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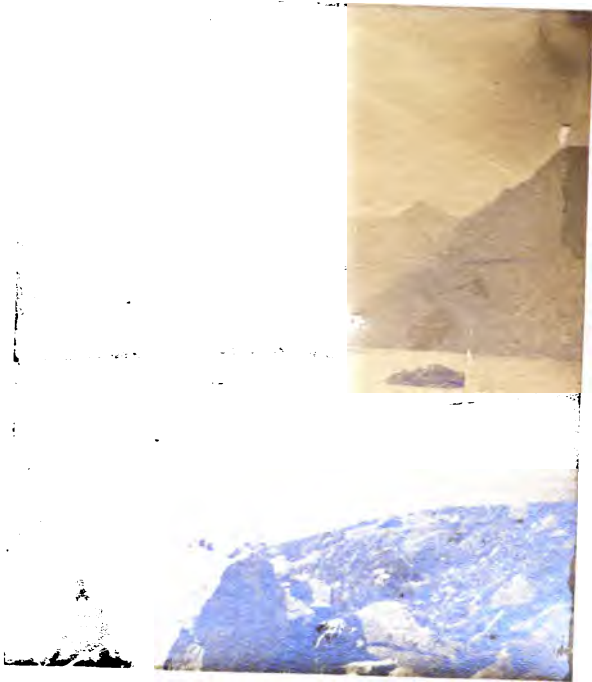
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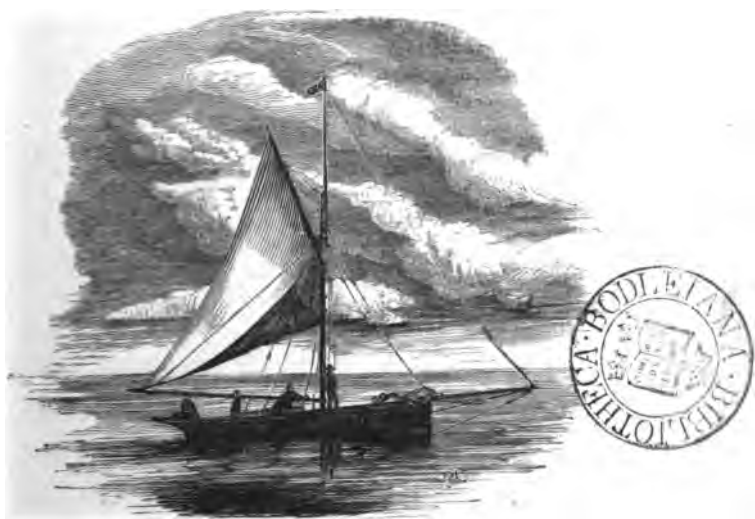


LOCH CORUISK, SKYE.

THE LAND OF LORNE,

INCLUDING THE CRUISE OF THE "TERN"
TO THE OUTER HEBRIDES.

BY
ROBERT BUCHANAN.



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THE CRUISE OF THE "*TERN*."



" Hebrid Isles,
Set far amid the melancholy main."

COLLINS.

THE LAND OF LORNE.

CHAPTER I.

NIGHT ON THE MINCH.

Gloomy Prophecies—Terrors of the Minch—The Viking—Hamish Shaw, the Pilot—Leaving Canna Harbour—Pictures of Skye and the Cuchullins—Remarks on Sir Walter Scott and his Poems—Afloat on the Minch—The Far-off Isles—Twilight—Hamish Shaw at the Helm—Summer Night—Talk about Ghosts and Superstitions—The Evil Eye—The Death-Cry—Wind Rising—Wind and Mist—Water Snakes—Midnight—The Strange Ship—Peep o' Day—The Red Buoy—Anchorage in Loch Boisdale.

“SHE is a poor thing, a bit toy!” said the captain of the Lowland trader, regarding the *Tern* from the deck of his big vessel, while we lay in Canna Harbour. “She’s no’ for these seas at all; and the quicker ye are ‘awa’ hame wi’ her round the Rhu ye’ll be the wiser. She should never hae quitted the Clyde.”

Set by the side of the trader's great hull, she certainly looked a "toy"—so tiny, so slight, with her tapering mast and tender spars. To all our enumeration of her good qualities, the captain merely replied an incredulous "oomph," and assured us that, were she as "good as gold," the waters of the Minch would drown her like a rat if there was any wind at all. Few yachts of twice her tonnage, and twice her beam, ever dared to show their sails on the outside of Skye, and the wiser they thought the captain. Why, even he, in his great vessel, which was like a rock in the water, had seen such sights out there as had made his hair stand on end; and he launched into a series of awful tales, showing how he had driven from the point of Sleat to Isle Ornsay "up to his neck" in the sea, how a squall off Dunvegan Head had carried away his topmast, broken his main-sail-boom, and swept his decks clean of boats and rubbish, all at one fell crash; and he added numberless other terrific things, all tending to show that we were likely to get into trouble. When he heard that we actually purposed crossing to Boisdale, and beating up along the shores of the Long Isles as far as

Stornoway, he set us down as madmen at once, and condescended to no more advice. After that, till the moment we sailed, he regarded us from the side of his vessel in a solemn sort of way, as if we were people going to be hung, and well deserving of our fate. You see, he was getting grey and cautious—his blood lacked phosphorus, his heart fire.

He frightened us a little, though. The Wanderer, who had planned the expedition, looked at the Skipper—or the Viking, as we got into the habit of calling him, because he wasn't like one. The Viking, who had never before ventured with a yacht beyond the Clyde, was very pale, and only wanted encouragement to turn tail and fly. But Hamish Shaw the pilot, setting his lips together, delivered himself so violently against flight, vowed so staunchly that having come thus far we must proceed or be for evermore branded as pretenders, and finally swore roundly by his reputation as a seaman to carry us safely through all difficulties, that even the Viking shook his horrent locks and became for the instant nearly as reckless as he looked. "Nothing," said the Viking in a glow of

intense ardour, "nothing gives me so much pleasure as tearing through the sea, with the wind blowing half a gale, and the boat's side buried to the cockpit combing."

We had all great confidence in Hamish Shaw, for two very good reasons; first, because he had long been accustomed to sailing all sorts of boats in those waters; and, second, because he was thoroughly plucky, steady as a rock and cool as snow, in times of peril. Again and again, during the voyage, did we find reason to bless ourselves that we had such a man on board. He was fond of talk, and had much to say well worth listening to, but at critical moments he was like the sphinx, only rather more active. To see him at the helm, with his eye on the water, steadily helping the little craft through a tempestuous sea, bringing her bow up to the billows, and burying it in them whenever they would have drowned her broadside, or sharply watching the water to windward, with the great mainsail sheet in his hand, shaking her through the squalls off a mountainous coast,—these were things worth seeing, things that made one proud of the race. As for the

Viking, although he had considerable experience in sailing in smooth water, and although he was a very handy fellow in the ship's-carpenter line, he was nowhere when it began to blow. The Wanderer could do a little in an emergency, but his nautical knowledge was very slight, just enabling him to distinguish one rope from another if he was not particularly hurried in his movements. Now, the Cook (as you have guessed from the beginning) was a lady, and of course could be of no use on deck in bad weather, although, as Hamish Shaw expressed it, she showed a man's spirit throughout the whole voyage.

In plain point of fact, there was only one thoroughbred sailor on board, only one man thoroughly competent to act on his own responsibility during a great emergency; and as he had only one pair of hands, and could not be everywhere at the same moment, 'twas a miracle that the *Tern* escaped destruction on more than one occasion. But (as the female novelists used to say) we anticipate.

As the distance from Canna to Loch Boisdale, the nearest point in the outer Hebrides, was about thirty

miles, all quite open water, without the chance of any kind of harbour, and as the *Tern*, even with a fair wind, could not be expected to run more than five or six miles an hour *in a sea*, it was advisable to choose a good day for the passage. As usual in such cases, we began by being over-cautious, and ended by being over-impatient. This day was too calm, that day was too windy. We ended by doing two things which we had begun by religiously vowing not to do—never to start for a long passage except at early morning, never to venture on such a passage without a fair wind. We weighed anchor at about two o'clock in the afternoon, with the wind blowing north-west — nearly dead in our teeth.

But it was a glorious day, sunny and cheerful; the clouds were high and white, and the waters were sparkling and flashing far as the eye could see. The little *Tern* seemed to catch the glee. Directly the wind touched her white wings, she slipped through the harbour with rapid flight, plunged splashing out at the harbour mouth, and was soon swimming far out in the midst of the ocean, happy, eager, tilting

the waves from her breast like a beautiful swimmer in his strength. Next to the rapturous enjoyment of having wings oneself, or being able to sport among the waves like a great northern diver, is the pleasure of sailing during such weather in a boat like the *Tern*. The blood is sparkling, but the brain is at work, beating steady as a pulse under thoughts that come and go like the glimmer of foam and light.

Canna never looked more beautiful than that day—her cliffs were wreathed into wondrous forms and tintured with deep ocean-dyes, and the slopes above were rich and mellow in the light. Beyond her, was Rum, always the same, a dark beauty with a gentle heart. But what most fascinated the eye was the southern coast of Skye, lying on the starboard bow as we were beating northward. The Isle of Mist* was clear on that occasion, not a vapour lingering on the heights, and although it must be admitted that much of its strange and eerie beauty was lost, still

* This name is purely Scandinavian—*Sky* signifying “cloud;” whence, too, our own word “sky,” the under, or vapour, heaven.

we had a certain gentle loveliness to supply its place. Could that be Skye, the deep coast full of rich warm under-shadow, the softly-tinted hills, "nakedly visible without a cloud," sleeping against the "dim sweet harebell-colour" of the heavens? Where was the thunder-cloud, the weeping shadows of the cirrus, the white flashes of cataracts through the black smoke of rain on the mountain-side? Were those the Cuchullins—the ashen-gray heights turning to solid amber at the peaks, with the dry seams of torrents softening in the sunlight to golden shades? Why, Blaven, with its hooked forehead, would have been bare as Primrose Hill, save for one slight white wreath of vapour, that, glittering with the hues of the prism, floated gently away to die in the delicate blue. Dark were the headlands, yet warmly dark, projecting into the sparkling sea and casting summer shades. Skye was indeed transformed, yet its beauty still remained spiritual, still it kept the faint feeling of the glamour. It looked like witch-beauty, wondrous and unreal. You felt that an instant might change it,—and so it might and did. Ere we had sailed many miles away, Skye was clouded over with a misty woe, her

face was black and wild, she sobbed in the midst of the darkness with the voice of falling rain and moaning winds.

Sir Walter Scott, in his notes made during a Highland tour, describes this western coast of Skye as "highly romantic, and at the same time displaying a richness of vegetation in the lower ground to which we have hitherto been strangers;" adding, "We passed three salt-water lochs, or deep embayments, called Loch Bracadale, Loch Einort, and Loch —, and about eleven o'clock opened up Loch Scavaig. We were now under the western termination of the high range of mountains called Cuillen, or Quillin, or Coolin, whose weather-beaten and serrated peaks we had admired at a distance from Dunvegan. They sank here upon the sea, but with the same bold and peremptory aspect which their distant appearance indicated. The tops of the ridge, apparently inaccessible to human foot, were rent and split into the most tremendous pinnacles. Towards the base of these bare and precipitous crags, the ground, enriched by the soil washed down from them, is comparatively verdant and productive." And he goes

on, in the same gazetteer style, to describe Loch Scavaig and Loch Corruisk, just as if he were Brown or Robinson, and not the second name in the great roll of glorious creators. Nor is he much more felicitous in his treatment of the same theme in verse. This is his poetic description of Loch Corruisk, and it is quoted with enthusiasm in every guide-book :

“ A while their route they silent made,
 As men who stalk for mountain-deer,
 Till the good Bruce to Ronald said,
 ‘ St. Mary ! what a scene is here !
 I’ve traversed many a mountain-strand,
 Abroad, and in my native land,
 And it has been my lot to tread
 Where safety more than pleasure led :
 Thus, many a waste I’ve wandered o’er,
 Clomb many a crag, cross’d many a moor,
 But, by my halidome,
 A scene so rude, so wild as this,
 Yet so sublime in barrenness,
 Ne’er did my wandering footsteps press
 Where’er I happ’d to roam.’

XIV.

“ No marvel thus the Monarch spake ;
 For rarely human eye has known
 A scene so stern as that dread lake,
 With its dark ledge of barren stone.

Seems that primeval earthquake's sway
 Hath rent a strange and shatter'd way
 Through the rude bosom of the hill,
 And that each naked precipice,
 Sable ravine, and dark abyss,
 Tells of the outrage still.
 The wildest glen, but this, can show
 Some touch of Nature's genial glow ;
 On high Benmore green mosses grow,
 And heath-bells bud in deep Glencroe,
 And copse on Cruchan-Ben ;
 But here,—above, around, below,
 On mountain or in glen,
 Nor tree, nor shrub, nor plant, nor flower,
 Nor aught of vegetative power,
 The weary eye may ken.
 For all is rocks at random thrown,
 Black waves, bare crags, and banks of stone,
 As if were here denied
 The summer sun, the spring's sweet dew,
 That clothe with many a varied hue
 The bleakest mountain-side.

xv.

“ And wilder, forward as they wound,
 Were the proud cliffs and lake profound.
 Huge terraces of granite black
 Afforded rude and cumber'd track ;
 For from the mountain hoar,
 Hurl'd headlong in some night of fear,
 When yell'd the wolf, and fled the deer,
 Loose crags had toppled o'er ;

And some, chance-poised and balanced, lay
 So that a stripling arm might sway
 A mass no host could raise,
 In Nature's rage at random thrown,
 Yet trembling like the Druid's stone
 On its precarious base.
 The evening mists, with ceaseless change,
 Now clothed the mountains' lofty range,
 Now left their foreheads bare,
 And round the skirts their mantle furl'd,
 Or on the sable waters curl'd,
 Or on the eddying breezes whirl'd,
 Dispersed in middle air.
 And oft, condensed, at once they lower,
 When, brief and fierce, the mountain shower
 Pours like a torrent down ;
 And when return the sun's glad beams,
 Whiten'd with foam a thousand streams
 Leap from the mountain's crown."

Bruce might swear himself hoarse "by his hali-
 dome" ere we could admit that the above was much
 more than the dryest verbiage. Yet the general fea-
 tures of the landscape are caught as in a photograph,
 with a bald fidelity which is characteristic of all Sir
 Walter's efforts in verse, and is noteworthy as having
 won for itself the special praise of Mr. Ruskin. We
 shall have something to say of Corruisk in good time,
 and it will not be difficult to deny that Walter Scott

felt the spirit of the wild scene at all,—so totally out of harmony with nature is his verbose enumeration of details. Shakspeare with his faultless vision would not have failed to see Corruisk as it is, and to picture it in true emotional colours, but perhaps only Shelley, of all our poets, could have felt it to the true spiritual height and blended it into music, thought, and dream.

With the same felicity in prose and verse, Sir Walter, in the already-quoted extract from his journal, talks of the Coolins having a "*peremptory aspect* which their distant appearance indicated" (we cannot construe this sentence), and in an easy general way, speaks of the scenery of the neighbourhood as "highly romantic." Is "peremptory," then, the adjective to apply to yonder peaks? Do the ghost-world, the strange dreams we have in sleep, the creeping thoughts we have in death-chambers, the whisperings we have from "that undiscovered country,"—do all these things, any of these things, strike us as being "peremptory?" There is a perkish, commonplace, pretentious air about that word, as applied to beautiful mountains. Like that other word "romantic," it should be cut out of

the poetic vocabulary. The beadle is "peremptory," and the sensation scenes at metropolitan theatres are "highly romantic."

We were flying along swiftly, and the breeze was heading us less and less. The sea still sparkled, far as the eye could see, a flashing surface—

"Dappled o'er with shadows flung
From many a brooding cloud ;"

the wool-white cloud above, the soft shadow below. There was no danger, and the Viking was like a lion. All went merry as a marriage bell. Picture after picture rose up, grew into perfect loveliness, and faded like a fairy palace into the air. Now it was Macleod's Maidens, the three sister peaks on the western coast of Skye, linked together by a dim rainbow, and glimmering brightly through a momentary shower ; again, it was the far-off mouth of Loch Bracadale, rich in the darkest purple tints, with a real red-sailed fishing-boat in the foreground, to bring out the picture, just as Turner would have placed it on the canvas ; and still again, it was the Cuchulins, already wreathed in mist, magnified to still more gigantic size by their own darkness, and look-

ing as forlorn as if no sunlight had ever fallen on their livid brows.

But more frequently, with keener interest, with more anxious longing, our eyes were turned westward—to the far-off Isles whither we were bound. We could see them better now, misted over by distance—part of the Barra highland, the three great hills of Uist, and, dimmest of all, the high hills of Harris. As the vapours shifted on the coast, the shape of the land changed—what had looked like mountains, drifted away before the wind—what had seemed a cloud, outlined itself darkly and more darkly; and, strange to say, the whole coast seemed, as we drew nearer, to retreat itself farther away, insomuch that when we had beaten ten or twelve miles of the actual distance to Loch Boisdale, the outer Hebrides looked as distant as ever, and we almost thought there must have been some mistake in our calculation of the number of miles across.

It was a strange feeling, riding out there in the open Minch in that little boat, and knowing that a storm, if it did catch us, would leave us little time to say our prayers. The vessel was too small

and crank to "lie to," and running before the wind she would have drowned herself in no time. True, we had extemporized a kind of wooden scuttle for the cockpit, which might be of service in a sea, and did actually save us from some peril; but the boat, as Hamish Shaw expressed it, wanted "body," and would never live out bad weather in the open. It was a wonder Hamish ever accompanied us at all—he had such a profound contempt for the *Tern*, quite agreeing with the skipper in Canna that she was merely a toy, a plaything. We suppose, however, that he had confidence in himself, and knew that if any one could save her at a pinch, he could.

We had started so late, that before we were half way across it was growing quite dark. It promised to be a good night, however. The worst of our situation just then was, that the wind was beginning to fail, and we were making very little way through the rough roll of the sea.

One certainly did not feel quite comfortable, tumbling out there in the deepening twilight, while the land on either side slowly mingled itself with the

clouds. After taking our bearings by the compass, and getting a drop of something warm, we could do nothing but sit and wait for events. The Viking was beginning to feel unwell. Shivering, he looked to windward, seeing all sorts of nameless horrors. Twenty times, at least, he asked Hamish what kind of a night it promised to be. Twice he rushed down to examine the weather-glass, an aneroid, and, to his horror, it was slowly sinking. Then he got lights, and buried himself among the charts, feebly gazing at a blank space of paper labelled "The Minch." At last, unable to disguise it any longer, he began to throw out dark hints that we were doomed, that it was madness sailing at night, that he had seen it from the beginning and should not have ventured so far, that he knew from the colour of the sky that we should have a storm that night, and that, only let him get safe back "round the Rhu," no temptation on earth should lure him again beyond the Crinan Canal.

But Hamish Shaw was in his glory. He loved sailing at night, and had been constantly urging us into it. He had learned the habit as a fisherman,—

it was associated with much that was wildest and noblest in his life—and he was firmly persuaded that he could see his way anywhere in the waters by night as well as by day. Owl-like, wakeful and vigilant, he sat at the helm, with his weather-beaten face looming through his matted ringlets, his black pipe set between his teeth, and his eye looking keenly to windward. He was not a sentimental man: he did not care much for “scenery;”—but do you think there was no dreamy poetry in his soul, that he had no subtle pleasure, concealed almost from himself, as the heaven bared its glittering breast of stars, and the water that darkened beneath reflected back the light, and the wind fell softly, till we could hear the deep breathing of the sea itself? What memories drifted across his brain—of wild nights at the herring-fishing, of rain, snow and wind, and of tender nights in his highland home, when he went courting in highland fashion to the lassie’s chamber-door! He is a strange study, Hamish Shaw. To hear him speak directly of any scene he has visited, you would not credit him with any insight. But he sees more than he knows. His life is too full to take

in separate effects, or to wonder anew. What light he throws for us on old thoughts and superstitions, on tender affections of the race! His speech is full of water and wind. He uses a fine phrase as easily as nature fashions a bud or a leaf. He speaks in natural symbols, as freely as he uses an oar. His clear fresh vision penetrates even into the moral world, quite open and fearless even there, where the best of us become purblind.

We have tried again and again, for our own amusement, to reproduce a few specimens of Shaw's English. He is a true Gael, and speaks a foreign tongue, acquired in early youth. His language is at once remarkable for its obscurity and the frequent use of big words, and yet for a strange felicity of verbal touch. He attaches a certain meaning of his own to words, and tries hard to be explicit. For example, speaking once of the Gaelic speech, and becoming warm in its praise, "The Gaelic," he said, "is a kind of guttural language, a principal and positive language; a language, d'ye see, *full o' knowledge and essence.*" It would be difficult to find anything obscurer than the beginning of the explanation

or more felicitous than its conclusion. The one word "essence" is perfect in its terse expression of meaning.

"I'm of the opinion," said Hamish, quietly surveying the heavens, "that the night will be good. Yon's a clear sky to windward, and there's nae carry. I would a heap sooner sail a craft like this by night than by day—the weather is more settled between gloaming and sunrise; and ye have one great advantage—the light is aye gaining on ye, instead o' the darkness."

"But Shaw, man," cried the Viking, "we are creeping closer and closer to the land, and it will be a fearful business making it out in the mirk."

Shaw shrugged his shoulders.

"If we canna see it, we maun just smell it," he said. "It's useless to fash your head."

"A coast sown with rocks as thick as if they had been shaken out of a pepper-box! Reefs here, danger everywhere! And not a beacon nearer than Rhu Hunish lighthouse! O my God!"

And the Viking wailed.

By this time the summer night had quite closed in; Canna and Skye had long faded out of sight

behind us, but we could still make out the form of the land ahead. The wind was rising again, and blowing gently on our quarter—so that we bade fair to make the coast of the Long Island sooner than was advisable. Still, it would have been injudicious to remain longer than was necessary out in the open; for a storm might come on by morning, and our fate be sealed. The best plan was to creep to within a couple of miles of the land, and hang about until we had sufficient daylight to make out our situation. It was even possible, if it did not get much darker, that we might even be able to distinguish the mouth of Loch Boisdale in the night.

The Viking plunged below to the charts, and to while away the time, the Wanderer began talking to the steersman about superstition. It was a fine eerie situation for a talk on that subject, and the still summer night, with the deep dreary murmur of the sea, powerfully stimulated the imagination.

“I say, Hamish,” said the Wanderer, abruptly, “do you believe in ghosts?”

Hamish puffed his pipe leisurely for some time before replying.

“I’m of the opinion,” he replied at last, beginning with the expression habitual to him—“I’m of the opinion that there’s strange things in the world. I never saw a ghost, and I don’t expect to see one. If the Scripture says true—I mean the Scripture, no’ the ministers—there has been ghosts seen before my time, and there may be some seen now. The folk used to say there was a Ben-shee in Skipness Castle—a Ben-shee with white hair and a mutch like an old wife—and my father saw it with his own een before he died. They’re curious people over in Barra, and they believe stranger things than that.”

“In witchcraft, perhaps?”

“There’s more than them believes in witchcraft. When I was a young man on board the *Petrel* (she’s one of Middleton’s fish-boats, and is over at Howth now) the winds were that wild, there seemed sma’ chance of winning hame before the new year. Weel, the skipper was a Skye man, and had great faith in an auld wife who lived alone up on the hillside; and without speaking a word to any o’ us, he went up to bid wi’ her for a fair wind. He crossed her hand wi’ siller, and she told him to bury a live

cat wi' its head to the airt wanted, and then to steal a spoon from some house, and get awa'. He buried the cat, and he stole the spoon. It's curious, but sure as ye live, the wind changed that night into the north-west, and never shifted till the *Petrel* was in Tobermory."

"Once let me be the hero of an affair like that," cried the Wanderer, "and I'll believe in the devil for ever after. But it was a queer process."

"The ways o' God are droll," returned Shaw seriously. "Some say that in old times the witches made a causeway o' whales from Rhu Hunish to Dunvegan Head. There are auld wives o'er yonder yet who hae the name of going out wi' the Deil every night in the shape o' blue hares, and I kenned a man who thought he shot one wi' a siller button. I dinna believe all I hear, but I dinna just disbelieve, either. Ye've heard o' the Evil Eye?"

"Certainly."

"When we were in Canna, I noticed a fine cow and calf standing by a house near the kirkyard, and I said to the wife as I passed (she was syning her pails at the door), 'Yon's a bonnie bit calf ye hae with the auld cow.' 'Ay,' says she, 'but I hope

ye didna look at them o'er keen'—meaning, ye ken, that maybe I had the Evil Eye. I laughed and told her that was a thing ne'er belong't to me nor mine. That minds me of an auld wife near Loch Boisdale, who had a terrible bad name for killing kye and doing mischief on corn. She was gleeed,* and had black hair. One day, when the folk were in kirk, she reached o'er her hand to a bairn that was lying beside her, and touched its cheek wi' her finger. Weel, that moment the bairn (it was a lassie, and had red hair) began greeting and turning its head from side to side like folk in fever. It kept on sae for days. But at last anither woman, who saw what was wrang, recommended eight poultices o' kyedung (one every night) from the innermost kye i' the byre. They gied her the poultices, and the lassie got weel."

"That was as strange a remedy as the buried cat," observed the Wanderer; "but I did not know such people possessed the power of casting the trouble on human beings."

Hamish puffed his pipe, and looked quietly at the sky. It was some minutes before he spoke again.

* She squinted.

“There was a witch family,” he said at last, “in Loch Carron, where I was born and reared. They lived their lane * close to the sea. There were three o’ them—the mither, a son, and a daughter. The mither had great lumps all o’er her arms, and sae had the daughter; but the son was a cleanhided lad, and he was the cleverest. Folk said he had the power o’ healing the sick, but only in ae way, by transferring the disease to him that brought the message seeking help. Once, I mind, a man was sent till him on horseback, bidding him come and heal a fisher who was up on the hill and like to dee. The warlock mounted his pony, and said to the man, ‘Draw back a bit, and let me ride before ye.’ The man, kenning nae better, let him pass, and followed ahint. They had to pass through a glen, and in the middle o’ the glen an auld wife was standing at her door. When she saw the messenger riding ahint the warlock, she screeched out to him as loud as she could cry—‘Ride, ride, and reach the sick lad first, or ye’re a dead man.’ At that the warlock looked black as thunder, and

* *Their lane*—alone.

galloped his pony; but the messenger being better mounted, o'ertook him fast, and got first to the sick man's bedside. In the night the sick man died. Ye see, the warlock had nae power o' shifting the complaint but on him that brought the message, and no' on him if the warlock didna reach the house before the messenger."

Here the Viking emerged with the whiskey-bottle, and Hamish Shaw wet his lips. We were gliding gently along now, and the hills of Uist were still dimly visible. The deep roll of the sea would have been disagreeable, perhaps, to the uninitiated, but we were hardened. While the Viking sat by, gazing gloomily into the darkness, the Wanderer pursued his chat with Shaw, or, rather, incited the latter to further soliloquies.

"Do you know, Hamish," he said, slyly, "it seems to me very queer that Providence should suffer such pranks to be played, and should entrust that marvellous power to such wretched hands. Come, now, do you actually fancy these things have happened?"

But Hamish Shaw was not the man to commit himself. He was a philosopher.

“I’m of the opinion,” he replied, “that it would be wrong to be o’er positive. Providence does as queer things, whiles,* as either man or woman. There was a strange cry, like the whistle of a bird, heard every night close to the cottage before Wattie Macleod’s smack was lost on St. John’s Point, and Wattie and his son drowned; then it stoppit. Whiles it comes like a sheep crying, whiles like the sound o’ pipes. I heard it mysel’ when my brither Angus died. He had been awa’ o’er the country, and his horse had fallen and kickit him on the navel. But before we heard a word about it, the wife and I were on the road to Angus’ house, and were coming near the burn that parted his house from mine. It was night, and bright moonlight. The wife was heavy at the time, and suddenly she grippit me by the arm and whispered, ‘Wheesht! do ye hear?’ I listened, and at first heard nothing. ‘Wheesht, again!’ says she; and then I heard it plain—like the low blowing o’ the bagpipes, slowly and sadly, wi’ nae tune. ‘O, Hamish,’ said the wife, ‘*wha* can it be?’ I said naething, but I felt my back all cold, and a sharp thread

* At times.

running through my heart. It followed us along as far as Angus' door, and then it went awa'. Angus was sitting by the fire; they had just brought him hame, and he told us o' the fall and the kick. He was pale, but didna think much was wrang wi' him, and talked quite cheerful and loud. The wife was sick and frightened, and they gave her a dram; they thought it was her trouble, for her time was near, but she was thinking o' the sign. Though we knew fine that Angus wouldna live, we didna dare to speak o' what we had heard. Going hame that nicht, we heard it again, and in a week he was lying in his grave."

The darkness, the hushed breathing of the sea, the sough of the wind through the rigging, greatly deepened the effect of this tale; and the Viking listened intently, as if he expected every moment to hear a similar sound presaging his own doom. Hamish Shaw showed no emotion. He told his tale as mere matter-of-fact, with no elocutionary effects, and kept his eye to windward all the time, literally looking out for squalls.

"For God's sake," cried the Viking, "choose some

other subject of conversation. We are in bad enough plight already, and don't want any more horrors."

"What! afraid of ghosts?"

"No, dash it!" returned the Viking; "but—but—as sure as I live, there's storm in yon sky!"

The look of the sky to windward was certainly not improving; it was becoming smoked over with thick mist. Though we were now only a few miles off the Uist coast, the loom of the land was scarcely visible; the vapours peculiar to such coasts seemed rising and gradually wrapping everything in their folds. Still, as far as we could make out from the stars, there was no carry in the sky.

"I'll no' say," observed Hamish, taking in everything at a glance—"I'll no' say but there may be wind ere morning; but it will be wind off the shore and we hae the hills for shelter."

"But the squalls! the squalls!" cried the Viking.

"The land is no' so high that ye need to be scared. Leave you the vessel to me, and I'll take her through it snug. But we may as weel hae the third reef in the mainsail, and mak' things ready in case o' need."



This was soon done. The mainsail was reefed, and the small jib substituted for the large one; and after a glance at the compass, Hamish again sat quiet at the helm.

“Barra,” he said, renewing our late subject of talk, “is a great place for superstition, and sae is Uist. The folk are like weans, simple and kindly. There is a Ben-shee weel-known at the head o’ Loch Eynort, and anither haunts one o’ the auld castles o’ the great Macneil o’ Barra. I hae heard, too, that whiles big snakes, wi’ manes like horses, come up into the fresh-water lakes and lie in wait to devour the flesh o’ man. In a fresh-water loch at the Harris, there was a big beast like a bull, that came up ae day and ate half the body o’ a lad when he was bathing. They tried to drain the loch to get at the beast, but there was o’er muckle water. Then they baited a great hook wi’ the half o’ a sheep, but the beast was o’er wise to bite. Lord, it was a droll fishing! They’re a curious people. But do ye no’ think, if the sea and the lochs were drainit dry, there would be all manner o’ strange animals that nae man kens the name o’? There’s a kind o’

water-world—nae man kens what it's like—for the drown'd canna see, and if they could see, they couldna speak. Ay!" he added, suddenly changing the current of his thoughts, "ay! the wind's rising, and we're no' far off the shore, for I can smell the land."

By what keenness of sense Hamish managed to "smell the land" we had no time just then to inquire, for all our wits were employed in looking after the safety of the *Tern*. She was bowling along under three-reefed mainsail and stormjib, and was getting just about as much as she could bear. With the rail under to the cockpit, the water lapping heavily against the cooming, and ever and anon splashing right over in the cockpit itself, she made her way fast through the rising sea. In vain we strained our eyes to discern the shore—

"The blinding mist came down and hid the land
As far as eye could see!"

All at once the foggy vapours peculiar to the country had steeped everything in darkness; we could guess from the helm where the land lay, but how near it was we were at a loss to tell. What with the whistling

wind, the darkness, the surging sea, we felt quite bewildered and amazed.

The Wanderer looked at his watch, and it was past midnight. Even if the fog cleared off, it would not be safe to take Loch Boisdale without good light, and there was nothing for it but to beat about till sunrise. This was a prospect not at all comfortable, for we might even then be in the neighbourhood of dangerous rocks, and if the wind rose any higher, we should be compelled to run before the wind, God knew whither. Meantime, it was determined to stand off a little to the open, in dread of coming to over-close quarters with the shore.

Hamish sat at the helm, stern and imperturbable. We knew by his silence that he was anxious, but he expressed no anxiety whatever. Ever and anon he slipped down his hand on the deck to leeward, feeling how near the water was to the cockpit, and as there seemed considerable danger of foundering in the heavy sea, he speedily agreed with us that it would be wise to close over the cockpit hatches. That done, all was achieved that hands could do, save holding the boat with the helm steady and close to

the wind—a task which Hamish fulfilled to perfection. Indeed, we were in no slight danger from squalls, for the wind was off the land, and nothing saved us, when struck by heavy gusts, but the firmness and skill of the helmsman. He had talked about smelling the land, but it is certain that he seemed to smell the wind: almost before a squall touched her, the *Tern* was standing up to it tight and firm, when ever so slight a falling off might have stricken us over to the mast, and perhaps (for the cockpit hatches were a small protection) foundered us in the open sea.

We will draw a veil over the sufferings of the Viking. He was a wreck by this time, too weak even to scream out his prophecies of doom, but lying anticipating his fate in the fore-castle hammock, with the grog at his side and his eyes closed despairingly against all the terrors of the scene. The Cook was lying in the cabin, very sick—in that happy frame of mind when it is a matter of indifference whether we float on or go to the bottom. The Wanderer, drenched through, clung close beside the pilot, and strained his eyes against wind and salt spray into the darkness. It

would be false to say that he felt comfortable, but as false to say that he was frightened. Though dreadfully excitable by nature, he was of too sanguine a temperament to be overpowered by half-seen perils. On the whole, though the situation was precarious, he had by no means made up his mind to be drowned; and there was something so stimulating in the brave conduct of the little ship, which seemed to be fighting out the battle on her own account, that at times he felt actually light-hearted enough to sing aloud a verse of his favourite "Tom Bowling." No man, however, could have sat yonder in the darkness, amid the rush of wind and wave, and failed to tremble at times, thinking of the power of God; so that again and again, through the Wanderer's mind, with a deep sea-music of their own, rolled the verses of the Psalm:—"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is

melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

It was now so dark that we could see nothing on any side of us, save the glitter of the crests of the waves, and the phosphorescent glimmer of the beaten water behind the keel. The wind was pretty steady, and the squalls not too frequent. We were running through the darkness at considerable speed, burying our bowsprit in every wave, and washing our decks as clean as salt water could make them. So low was the *Tern's* rail, and so close to the sea, even on the weather side, that it was almost like being dragged through the water bodily with the chilly waves lapping round one's waist.

Suddenly, out of the darkness ahead, shot a sharp

glimmer of light; then there was a loud sound like the creaking of cordage and noise of sails; and then, before we could utter a cry, a large brig dashed across our bows, running with a free sheet before the wind. Ghostly and strange she looked in the mist, driving at tremendous speed, and churning the sea to sparkling foam. With a loud oath, Hamish shoved the helm hard a-port, and brought the head of the *Tern* up to the wind. We had narrowly escaped a collision. With fascinated eyes we watched the brig dash on until it was swallowed up in the darkness, and when it was quite gone, drew a heavy breath of relief.

“Lord, that was a close shave!” muttered Shaw, drawing his cuff across his mouth, as is his manner when agitated. “Wha would hae thought o’ meeting strange craft hereabouts? We’d maybe better rig out the mast-head lantern, in case o’ mair accidents.”

This was soon done, and although the lantern burnt blue and dim, we felt more secure. After so narrow an escape, what reasonable creature would have refused to drink his own health in the water of

life? The grog bottle was passed round, and never was a "nip of the screech" received with more affectionate unction.

It was weary work, that waiting on in the darkness. The wind sang, the water sobbed, the sail moaned, until the Wanderer began to get sleepier and sleepier, and at last, wet as he was, sank off into a doze, wherein he was just half conscious of the boat's motion through the water, and half dreaming of things far away. Suddenly he was startled by a roar in his ear, and rubbed his eyes wildly, listening. It was only Hamish Shaw, saying quietly:

"It's beginning to get light. I see the loom o' the land."

Shivering like a half-drowned rat in the cold damp air of the dawn, and dashing the wet hair out of his weary eyes, the Wanderer stared all round him, and saw, when his obfuscated wits were able to concentrate themselves, that it was nearly daybreak, though all was dark above. A dim, silvern, misty glimmer was on the sea, and about two miles to the westward the land lay black in a mist like the smoke nearest the funnel of a newly-coaled

steamer. The Viking was poking his head through the cabin-hatch and gazing shoreward.

“Can ye mak’ out the shape o’ these hills?” he asked of the pilot. “Loch Boisdale should be hereabouts.”

Hamish shook his head.

“We maun creep in closer to mak’ certain,” he replied. “It’s o’er dark yet. Yon bit place yonder—where ye see a shimmer like the gleam o’ herring-scales—looks like the mouth o’ the loch, but we maun creep in cannie and get mair light.”

Although Shaw had been herring-fishing on the coast for many years, he was not so familiar with the coast as might have been expected. He knew its general outline, but had not made close observation of details. With the indifference peculiar to the fishers, he had generally trusted to Providence and his own sagacity, without making any mental note of his experiences. So it was not until we had twice or thrice referred to the chart, that he remembered that just south of Boisdale, about half a mile from shore, there was a dangerous reef called Mackenzie Rock, and that above this rock there was a

red buoy, which, if descried in the dim light, would be a certain index to the whereabouts of the mouth of the loch.

“Tam Saunders put the *Wild Duck* on that rock when I was up here in the *Gannet*,” said Hamish; “but she was as strong as iron—different frae this wee bit shell o’ a thing—and they keepit her fixit there till the flood, and then floated her off wi’ scarce a scratch. We’ll just put her about, and creep in shore on the other tack,”

Though the day was slowly breaking, it was still very misty, and a thin cold “smurr” was beginning to dreep down on the sea. The wind was still sharp and strong, the sea high, and the squalls dangerous; but we knew now that the worst of our troubles must be over. As we approached closer to the shore, we noticed one great bluff, or headland, from which the land receded on either side, leaving it darkly prominent; and a reference to the chart soon convinced us that this headland was no other than the Ru Hordag, which lies a few miles to the south of Loch Boisdale. Sowe put about again, and slipped up along the land, lying very close to the wind. It was

soon clear that the dawn, although it had fully broken, was not going to favour us with a brilliant exhibition, nor to dispel the dangerous vapours in which the shore was shrouded. The whole shape of the land was distorted. One could merely conjecture where solid earth ended and mist began—all was confusion. No sun came out—only the dull glimmer through the miserable “smurr” betokened that it was day.

Suddenly, with a shriek of joy, the Viking discovered the buoy, and pointed it out through the rain. Yes, there it was, a red spot in a circle of white foam, about a quarter of a mile on the weather quarter. With this assistance, it was decided that the spot which Shaw had compared to the “gleam of herring-scales” was indeed the mouth of the loch. Never did voyagers hail the sight of haven with greater joy!

It was a run of nearly a mile up to the anchorage, and the passage was by no means a safe one; but Hamish, once in the loch, knew every stone and shallow perfectly. When we cast anchor, the thin “smurr” had changed into a heavy rain, and all the

scene around was black and wild. But what cared we? The fire was lighted in the forecastle, Hamish put on the kettle, and the kettle began to sing. Then, after donning dry clothes, we sat down as merry as crickets. The Cook recovered, and poached the eggs. The Wanderer dozed smilingly in a corner. The Viking swore roundly that it had been the "jolliest night" he had ever spent, and that such experiences made him in love with sailing. Hamish Shaw, to whom all the glory of the night belonged, first lit his black cutty pipe and rested his head against the side of the forecastle, and then, in an instant, dropped off heavy as a log, worn out with fatigue, and still gripping the cutty firmly between his teeth as he slept.

CHAPTER II.

THE FISHERS OF THE LONG ISLAND.

Loch Boisdale—The *Tern* at anchor—The Inn and the Population—Rain—Boisdale in the Herring Season—Fishing-boats and Camps—A Night in a West Country Smack—Herring-gutters—Habits of East Country Fishermen.

THE *Tern's* first anchorage in the Outer Hebrides was at Loch Boisdale, and it was there that the dreary landscape of the Long Island began to exercise its deep fascination over the Wanderer's mind. We lay at the usual place, close to the pier and inn, in the full enjoyment of the ancient and fish-like smell wafted to us from the curing places ashore. The herring-fishers had nearly all departed, save one or two native crews who were still labouring leisurely; but they had left their *débris* everywhere—skeletons of huts, piles of peat, fish-bones, scraps of rotten nets, even broken pots and dishes. One or two huts,

some entirely of wood, stood empty, awaiting the return of their owners in the following spring. The whole place was deserted, its harvest time was over. When we rowed ashore in the punt, the population, consisting of two old men and some dirty little boys, received us in grim amazement and silence, until the advent of the innkeeper, who, repressing all outward symptoms of wonder, bade us a sly welcome and showed us the way to his establishment. The obvious impression was that we were insane; the tiny craft in which we had come over, our wild and haggard appearance, and, above all, the fact that we had actually come to Loch Boisdale for pleasure (a fact unprecedented in the mind of the oldest inhabitant), all contributed to strengthen this belief. The landlord was free and inquisitive, humouring us cunningly, as keepers do mad people, receiving all our statements calmly and without contradiction, answering all our questions in the easy manner found useful in dealing with idiots and infants, never thinking it worth while to correct us when we were wrong. As he sat chatting with us over a glass of whiskey in a mildewy room of the inn, the inhabitants dropped

in one by one ; first the two old men, then a little boy, then a tipsy fisherman, and so on till the room was full of spectators, all with their mouths wide open, and all without any sign of ordering or drinking anything, staring at the strangers. This volley of eyes became at last so unbearable, that it was thought advisable to direct it elsewhere by ordering "glasses round ;" an act of generosity which, however grateful to the feelings, was received without enthusiasm, though the mouths and eyes opened still wider in amaze. The advent of the whiskey, however, acted like a charm, and the company burst into a torrent of Gaelic.

The result of a long conversation with the populace—which in number and appearance bore about the same relation to a respectable community that a stage "mob" in "Julius Cæsar" would bear to the real article—was not particularly edifying. These gentlemen were cynical on the merits of Loch Boisdale ; its principal beauties, in their opinion, being ague, starvation, and weariness. For any person to remain there, ever so short a time, who could by any possibility get out of it, was a thing not to be

credited by common-sense. The innkeeper, however, tried to convey to us his comprehension that we had come there, not for pleasure, but "on a discovering manner," by which mystical Celticism he meant to say that we were visitors come to make inquiries, possibly with a view to commerce or statistics. He shook his head over both country and people, and seemed to think our expedition was a waste of time.

For three days after that, it rained as it can rain only in the Long Island; and when at last, tired out of patience, we rushed ashore, our friend the innkeeper received us with a deprecating smile. With keen sarcasm, we demanded if it were always "that sort of weather" in Loch Boisdale; but he replied quite calmly, "Ay, much about." But when we sat down over usquebaugh, and the rain, still plashing darkly without,

"With its twofold sound,
The clash hard by, and the murmur all round!"

showed that the weather was little likely to abate that day, the landlord seemed to think his credit at stake, and that even Loch Boisdale was appearing at

a disadvantage. To console him, we told him that story of the innkeeper at Arrochar which poor Hugh Macdonald used to retail with such unction over the toddy. An English traveller stayed for some days at Arrochar, and there had been nothing but rain from morn to night. The landlord tried to keep up his guest's spirits by repeated prophecies that the weather was "about to break up;" but at last, on the fifth day, the stranger could endure it no longer. "I say, landlord; have you ever—now on your honour—have you ever any other sort of weather in this confounded place?" The landlord replied humbly, yet bitterly: "Speak nae mair, sir, speak nae mair—I'm just perfectly ashamed of the way in which our weather's behaving!" But the Loch Boisdale landlord seemed to think the tale infinitely too serious for laughter.

As we have noted above, the herring harvest was over. Twice in the year there is good fishing—in the spring and in the autumn; but the autumn fishing is left quite in the hands of a few native boats. The moment the spring fishing ends, Loch Boisdale subsides into torpor. All is desolate and still; only

the fishy smell remains, to remind the yawning native of the glory that is departed.

A busy sight indeed is Loch Boisdale or Stornoway in the herring season. Smacks, open boats, skiffs, wherries, make the narrow waters shady; not a creek, however small, but holds some boat in shelter. A fleet, indeed!—the Lochleven boat from the east coast, with its three masts and three huge lugsails; the Newhaven boat with its two lugsails; the Isle of Man “jigger;” the beautiful Guernsey runner, handsome as a racing yacht, and powerful as a revenue-cutter; besides all the numberless fry of less noticeable vessels, from the fat west-country smack with its comfortable fittings down to the miserable Arran wherry.* Swarms of seagulls float

* The Arran wherry, now nearly extinct, is a wretched-looking thing without a bowsprit, but with two strong masts. Across the foremast is a bulkhead, and there is a small locker for blankets and bread. In the open space between bulkhead and locker birch tops are thickly strewn for a bed, and for covering there is a huge woollen waterproof blanket ready to be stretched out on spars. Close to the mast lies a huge stone, and thereon a stove. The cable is of *heather rope*, the anchor *wooden*, and the stock a *stone*. Rude and ill-found as these boats are, they face weather before which any ordinary yachtsman would quail.

everywhere, and the loch is so oily with the fishy deposit that it requires a strong wind to ruffle its surface. Everywhere on the shore and hill-sides, and on the numberless islands, rises the smoke of camps. Busy swarms surround the curing-houses and the inn, while the beach is strewn with fishermen lying at length, and dreaming till work-time. In the afternoon, the fleet slowly begins to disappear, melting away out into the ocean, not to re-emerge till long after the grey of the next dawn.

Did you ever go out for a night with the herring fishers? If you can endure cold and wet, you would enjoy the thing hugely, especially if you have a boating mind. Imagine yourself on board a west-country smack, running from Boisdale Harbour with the rest of the fleet. It is afternoon, and there is a nice fresh breeze from the south-west. You crouch in the stern by the side of the helmsman, and survey all around you with the interest of a novice. Six splendid fellows, in various picturesque attitudes, lounge about the great, broad, open hold, and another is down in the forecastle boiling coffee. If you were not there, half of these would be taking

their sleep down below. It seems a lazy business, so far; but wait! By sunset the smack has run fifteen miles up the coast, and is going seven or eight miles east of Ru Hunish lighthouse; many of the fleet still keep her company, steering thick as shadows in the summer twilight. How the gulls gather yonder! That dull splash ahead of the boat was caused by the plunge of a solan goose. That the herrings are hereabout, and in no small numbers, you might be sure, even without that bright phosphorescent light which travels in patches on the water to leeward. Now is the time to see the lounging crew dart into sudden activity. The boat's head is brought up to the wind, and the sails are lowered in an instant.* One man grips the helm, another seizes the back rope of the net, a third the "skunk" or body, a fourth is placed to see the buoys clear and heave them out, the rest attend forward, keeping a sharp look-out for other nets, ready, in case the boat should run too fast, to steady her by dropping the anchor a few fathoms into the sea. When all

* There is fashion everywhere. An east-country boat always shoots *across* the wind, of course carrying some sail; while a west-country boat shoots *before* the wind, with bare poles

the nets are out, the boat is brought bow on to the net, the "swing" (as they call the rope attached to the net) secured to the smack's "bits," and all hands then lower the mast as quickly as possible. The mast lowered, secured, and made all clear for hoisting at a moment's notice, and the candle lantern set up in the iron stand made for the purpose of holding it, the crew leave one look-out on deck, with instructions to call them up at a fixed hour, and turn in below for a nap in their clothes: unless it so happens that your brilliant conversation, seasoned with a few bottles of whiskey, should tempt them to steal a few more hours from the summer night. Day breaks, and every man is on deck. All hands are busy at work, taking the net in over the bow, two supporting the body, the rest hauling the back rope, save one who draws the net into the hold, and another who arranges it from side to side in the hold to keep the vessel even. Tweet! tweet! that thin cheeping sound, resembling the razor-like call of the bat, is made by the dying herrings at the bottom of the boat. The sea to leeward, the smack's hold, the hands and arms of the men, are gleaming like

silver. As many of the fish as possible are shaken loose during the process of hauling in, but the rest are left in the net until the smack gets to shore. Three or four hours pass away in this wet and tiresome work. At last, however, the nets are all drawn in, the mast is hoisted, the sail set, and while the cook (there being always one man having this branch of work in his department) plunges below to prepare breakfast, the boat makes for Loch Boisdale. Everywhere on the water, see the fishing-boats making for the same bourne, blessing their luck or cursing their misfortune, just as the event of the night may have been. All sail is set if possible, and it is a wild race to the market. Even when the anchorage is reached, the work is not quite finished; for the fish has to be measured out in "cran" baskets,* and delivered at the curing station. By the time that the crew have got their morning dram, have arranged the nets snugly in the stern, and have had some herrings for dinner, it is time to be

* A cran holds rather more than a herring barrel, and the average value of a cran measure of herrings is about one pound sterling.

off again to the harvest field. Half the crew turn in for sleep, while the other half hoist sail and conduct the vessel out to sea.

Huge, indeed, are the swarms that inhabit Boisdale, afloat or ashore, during this harvest; but, partly because each man has business on hand, and partly because there is plenty of sea-room, there are few breaches of the peace. On Saturday night the public-house is crowded, and now and then the dull roar ceases for a moment as some obstreperous member is shut out summarily into the dark. Besides the regular fishermen and people employed at the curing stations, there are the herring-gutters—women of all ages, many of whom follow singly the fortunes of the fishers from place to place. Their business is to gut and salt the fish, which they do with wonderful dexterity and skill.

Hideous, indeed, looks a group of these women, defiled from head to foot with herring garbage, and laughing and talking volubly, while gulls innumerable float above them and fill the air with their discordant screams. But look at them when their work is over, and they are changed indeed. Always

cleanly, and generally smartly, dressed, they parade the roads and wharf. Numbers of them are old and ill-favoured, but you will see among them many a blooming cheek and beautiful eye. Their occupation is a profitable one, especially if they be skilful; for they are paid according to the amount of work they do.

It is the custom of most of the east-country fishers to bring over their own women—one to every boat, sleeping among the men, and generally related to one or more of the crew. We have met many of these girls, some of them very pretty, and could vouch for their perfect purity. Besides their value as cooks, they can gut herrings and mend nets; but their chief recommendation in the eyes of the canny fishermen is that they are kith and kin, while the natives are strangers “no’ to be trusted.” The east-country fisherman, on his arrival, invariably encamps on shore, and the girl or woman “keeps the house” for the whole crew.

For the fisherman of the east coast likes to be comfortable. He is at once the most daring and the most careful. He will face such dangers on

the sea as would appal most men, while at the same time he is as cautious as a woman in providing against cold and ague. How he manages to move in his clothes is matter for marvel, for he is packed like a patient after the cold-water process. Only try to clothe yourself in all the following articles of attire:—pair of socks, pair of stockings over them half up the leg, to be covered by the long fishing-boots; on the trunk, a thick flannel, covered with an oilskin vest; after that, a common jacket and vest; on the top of these, an oilskin coat; next, a mighty muffler to wind round the neck and bury the chin and mouth; and last of all, the sou'-wester! This is the usual costume of an east-country fisherman, and he not only breathes and lives in it, but manages his boat on the whole better than any of his rivals on the water. He drags himself along on land awkwardly enough; and on board, instead of rising to walk, he rolls, as it were, from one part of the boat to the other. He is altogether a more calculating dog than the west-country man, more eager for gain, colder and more reticent in all his dealings with human kind.

On our arrival at Loch Boisdale in the *Tern*, there was nothing to redeem the cheerless gloom of the place. We lingered only a few days, during which it blew a violent gale; and then, slipping out of the harbour with the first light, began to work northward along the coast.

CHAPTER III.

GLIMPSES OF THE OUTER HEBRIDES.

First Glimpse—The Uists and Benbecula—Their Miserable Aspects—Hamish Shaw—Solemnity of the People—Brighter Glimpses—The Western Coast of the Island—Winter Storm—The Sound of Harris—The Norwegian Skipper—The Fjords—Kelp-burners—View from Kenneth Hill, Loch Boisdale—A Sunset—The Lagoons—Characteristics of the People—Civilized and Uncivilized—Miserable Dwellings—Comfortable Attire—Their Superstitions and deep Spiritual Life.

A DREARY sky, a dreary fall of rain. Long low flats covered with their own damp breath, through which the miserable cattle loomed like shadows. Everywhere lakes and pools, as thickly sown amid the land as islands amid the Pacific waters. Huts wretched and chilly, scarcely distinguishable from the rock-strewn marshes surrounding them. To the east the Minch, rolling dismal waters towards the far-off heads of Skye; to the west the Ocean, foaming at the lips,

and stretching barren and desolate into the rain-charged clouds.

Such was the first view of Ultima Thule, and such indeed are the Outer Hebrides during two or three days out of the seven. Theirs is the land of Utgard-Loke, a lonely outer region, not dear to the gods. There are mountains, but they do not abound, and are unadorned with, the softer colours which beautify the inner and more southerly isles. There are no trees, and few flowers. Two-thirds of the herbage lacks the exquisite softness of true pasture. The peat bog supplies the place of the meadow, the grey boulders strew the hills in lieu of red heather. The land is torn up everywhere into rocky fjords and desolate lagoons. Where the sea does not reach in an arm, the fresh water comes up and deepens in countless lakes and pools. There are few song birds, even the thrush being rare; but the wild goose screams overhead, and the ice-duck haunts the gloaming with its terribly human "Calloo! calloo!"

The islands of Uist, with Benbecula between, extend from the Sound of Harris as far south as Barra,

and appear to have originally formed one unbroken chain; and still, indeed, at low ebbs, a person might almost walk dryshod from Loch Boisdale to Loch Maddy. On the eastern side, and here and there in the interior, there are high hills, such as Hecla and Ben Eval; and everywhere on the eastern coast reach long arms of the sea, winding far into the land, and sometimes, as in the case of Loch Eport, reaching to the very fringe of the Western ocean. The land is, for the most part, low and unfertile, but there are a few breezy uplands and fine moors. All along the western side of the islands stretches a blank coast-line, unbroken by loch or haven, however small; and above it rises a broad tract of hillocks, composed of snow-white sand and powdered sea-shells, and covered by dry green pasture. Washed and winnowed out of the deep bed of the ocean, driven in and piled up by the great waters, the sands and shells gather year after year, and, mixing with the moister soil of the interior, yield an arable and fertile soil.

To the mind of Hamish Shaw, who has been here many a year herring fishing, these features of the land are quite without interest or excuse.

“It’s a poor, miserable country,” he avers; “little use to man!” And this, by the way, is the standard by which Shaw measures all the things of this world—their greater or less utility to the human. He has a sneer for every hill, however high, that will not graze sheep. A seagull or a hawk he would destroy pitilessly, because it cannot be converted into food. He is angry with the most picturesque fjörds, until it can be shown that the herring visit them, or that the hill burns that flow into them afford good trout. All this is the more remarkable in a man so thoroughly Celtic, so strangely spiritual in his reasonings, so pure with the purity of the race. There is a fresh life grafted on his true nature. Inoculated early with the love for commerce, he most admires cultivated land-scenery of any kind; but that original nature which delights in the wild and picturesque, is still unconsciously nourished by the ever various sea whereon he earns his bread.

Hamish Shaw’s charge against the Long Island is substantial enough; the country is poor, and neither fat nor fertile. The harvest is very early and very poor. There is an excellent shield against cold, in the

shape of beds of excellent peat, sometimes twenty feet in depth, and there is a certain provision against famine in the innumerable shell-fish which cover the numberless shores. The tormentil, properly pounded and prepared, furnishes a first-rate tan for cow or horse leather, of which the people make shoes. The land is for the most part little better than waste land, but there is good pasturage for sheep.

The people, on the first view, seem slow and listless,—overshadowed, too, with the strange solemnity of the race. There is no smile on their faces. Young and old drag their limbs, not as a Lowlander drags his limbs, but lissomly, with a swift serpentine motion. The men are strong and powerful, with deep-set eyes and languid lips, and they never excite themselves over their labour. The women are meek and plain, full of a calm domestic trouble, and they work harder than their lords. “A poor, half-hearted people!” says the Pilot; “why don’t they till the land and fish the seas?”

Here, again, the Pilot has his reasons. The people are half-hearted—say, an indolent people. They do no justice to their scraps of land, which, poor as they

be, are still capable of great improvement; but their excuse is that they derive little substantial benefit from improvements made where there is only yearly tenure. They hunger often, even when the fjörds opposite their own doors are swarming with cod and ling; but it is to be taken into consideration that only a few of them live on the sea-shore or possess boats. They let the ardent east-country fishermen carry off the finest hauls of herring. Their work stops when their mouths are filled, and yet they are ill content to be poor.

All this, and more than this, is truth, and sad truth. Hamish has a strong bill against both country and people. But there is another and finer side to the truth. The watery wastes of Uist gather powerfully on the imagination, and the curious race that inhabit them grow upon the heart.

At the first view, as we have said, all is dreary—sky, land, water; but after a little time, after the mind has got the proper foreground for these new prospects, the feeling changes from one of total depression into a sense of peculiar magic. Instead of dull flat pools, the lagoons assume their glory of

many-coloured weeds and innumerable water-lilies; out of the dreary peat bog rise delicate vapours that float in fantastic shapes up the hill-side; the sun peeps out, and the mossy hut sends its blue smoke into the clear, still air; all changes, and every nook of the novel prospect has a beauty of its own.

His must be a strange soul who, wandering over these hillocks and gazing westward and seaward in calm weather, is not greatly awed and moved. There is no pretence of effect, no tremendousness, no obtrusive sign of power. The sea is glassy smooth, the long swell does not break at all, until, reaching the smooth sand, it fades softly with deep monotonous moan. Here and there, sometimes close to land, sometimes far out seaward, a horrid reef slips its black back through the liquid blue, or a single rock emerges, tooth-like, thinly edged with foam. Southward loom the desolate heights of Barra, with crags and rocks beneath, and although there is no wind, the ocean breaks there with one broad and frightful flash of white. The sea-sound in the air is faint and solemn; it does not cease at all. But what deepens most the strangeness of the scene, and weighs most

sadly on the mind, is the pale sick colour of the sands. Even on the green heights the wind and rain have washed out great hollows, wherein the powdered shells are drifted like snow. You are solemnized as if you were walking on the great bed of the ocean, with the serene depths darkening above you. You are ages back in 'time, alone with the great forces antecedent to man; but humanity comes back upon you creepingly, as you think of wanderers out upon that endless waste, and search the dim sea-line in vain for a sail.

Calm like this is even more powerful than the storm. Under that stillness you are afraid of something—nature, death, immortality, God. But at the rising of the winds rises the savage within you: the blood flows, the heart throbs, the eyes are pinched close, the mouth shut tight. You can resist now as mortal things resist. Lifted up into the whirl of things, life is all; the stillness—nature, death, God—is naught.

Terrific, nevertheless, is the scene on these coasts when the storm wind rises,—

“Blowing the trumpet of Euroclydon.”

Westward, above the dark sea-line, rise the purple-black clouds, driving with a tremendous scurry eastward, while fresh vapours rise swiftly to fill up the rainy gaps they leave behind them. As if at one word of command, the waters rise and roar, their white crests, towering heavenward, glimmering against the driving mist. Lightning, flashing out of the sky, shows the long line of breakers on the flat sand, the reefs beyond, the foamy tumult around the rocks southward. Thunder crashes afar, and the earth reverberates. So mighty is the wind at times, that no man can stand erect before it; houses are thrown down, boats lifted up and driven about like faggots. The cormorants, ranged in rows along their solitary cliffs, eye the wild waters in silence, starving for lack of fish, and even the nimble seagull beats about screaming, unable to make way against the storm.

These are the winter gales,—the terror alike of husbandmen and fishers. The west wind begins to blow in October, and gradually increases in strength, till all the terrors of the tempest are achieved. Hailstorms, rainstorms, snowstorms alternate, with the

terrific wind trumpeting between; though the salt sea-breath is so potent, even in severe seasons, that the lagoons seldom freeze and the snow will not lie. The wild wandering birds—the hooper, the bean-goose, the gray-lag, all the tribes of ducks—gather together on the marshes, sure of food here, though the rest of the north be frozen. The great Arctic seal sits on Haskier and sails through the Sound of Harris. Above the wildest winds are heard the screams of birds.

Go in December to the Sound of Harris, and on some stormy day gaze on the wild scene around you; the whirling waters, sown everywhere with isles and rocks—here the tide foaming round and round in an eddy powerful enough to drag along the largest ship—there a huge patch of seaweed staining the waves and betraying the lurking reef below. In the distance loom the hills of Harris, blue-white with snow, and hidden ever and anon in flying mist. Watch the terrors of the great Sound—the countless reefs and rocks, the eddies, the furious wind-swept waters; and pray for the strange seamen whose fate it may be to drive helpless thither. Better the great

ocean, in all its terror and might. Yet, through that fatal gap, barks, though unpiloted, have more than once driven safely. Into Loch Maddy, while we were lying there, dashed a water-logged vessel, laden with wood, from Norway. Caught by tempests off the Butt of Lewis, she had run down the western coast of the Outer Hebrides, and was in dire distress, when, as a last resource, it was determined to take the Sound. No man on board knew the place, and it was impossible to send on shore for a pilot. On they drove, the skipper working with his men, the lead-line constantly going, the watches at bow and on mast-head singing out whenever any dangerous spot loomed in view. All along the coast gathered the island people, expecting every moment to see the vessel dashed to pieces; and to the skipper's frenzied eye they were *wreckers* watching for their prey. For a miracle, the vessel went safely through, without so much as a scratch. The skipper, with bleeding hands and tearful eyes, brought his ship into Maddy. All his stores were gone, save a few barrels of gin, and these he contrived to exchange for common necessaries. Though it was still

wild weather, and though his vessel was quite unseaworthy, he was bent on pushing forward to Liverpool. Off he went, and after a day's absence returned again, wild and anxious. He had beaten as far as Barra Head, and being checked there by a gale from the south-west, had been compelled to return as he had come. Again he drove forth, and disappeared; and again he reappeared, wilder than ever, but as indomitable. The wind had once more checked him off Barra, and hurled him back to Loch Maddy. He started a third time, and did not return. It is to be hoped that he reached his destination in safety, and that when he next goes afloat it will be in a better vessel.

To the mind of a seaman, such coasts as that of the Long Island can scarcely look attractive or kindly; for his quick eye perceives all the danger, all the ghastly plotting against his life. Yet in the summer-time the broad and sandy western tracts are very beautiful in their luxuriant vegetation, covered with daisies, buttercups, and the lesser orchids, brightly intermingled with the flowers of the white clover. They are quite pas-

toral and peaceful, despite their proximity to the great waters.*

Indeed, the place is full of attractions, directly the vulgar feeling is abandoned, and the mind, instead of

* The western side of North Uist, as of other parts of the Long Islands, is subject to the sand inundation; but though this is common on seashores, there are not many places where the consequences are beneficial. The tenants, it is true, are not always of this opinion, as they are occasionally sufferers; but the proprietors have also hitherto bewildered themselves on this subject, as they have equally overlooked the benefits which they derive on one hand, while they contemplate the loss they endure on the other. In all these islands, the sand is chiefly or entirely calcareous, formed of the fragments of shells. These being washed up by the sea, are ground to powder by the waves; and this, becoming dry at low-water, is carried onwards to the land by the violence of the winds. Thus there is formed a high and irregular bank of dry sand immediately on the shore, generally broken into hillocks and excavations, and, wherever it appears solid, compacted by the roots of the well-known grasses and plants which nature seems to have destined to this office. Much of the sand that is blown up escapes over this first barrier into the interior country; but the barrier itself moves on also in time, to be succeeded by a new bank and fresh hillocks, sometimes in new places, at others in the same, as accidental circumstances, such as the lee of a rock, the presence of moisture, or the vigour of vegetation, favour its accumulation. To produce the destruction of a bank, or the removal of a hillock, it is sufficient that a hole be made, however small, or a portion of the vegetable covering removed; circumstances which proprietors in general are

waiting to be galvanised by some powerful effect, quietly resigns itself to the spirit of the scene. Sight-seeing is like dram-drinking, and the sight-seer, like the dram-drinker, is not particular about

careful to prevent. In this country, it is extremely difficult to check the tenants in this matter; as the *Galium verum*, one of the most useful and abundant of these protecting vegetables, is much used by them in dyeing. The wind, having once found a breach, soon scoops out and disperses the sand, leaving broken banks, which, lastly, are reduced to pillars, standing as memorials of the former height of the whole, but destined, in no long time, to follow the same course. Thus, as these outer barriers are dispersed and reduced to the level of the seashore, the sea seems to gain on the land. But, in other places, new banks are forming from the same causes, and here the land is gaining on the sea. With regard to the tenants, the loss of one is generally the gain of another. To the proprietor, the whole might be considered as pretty fairly balanced; but it is more likely that, on the whole, the land is rather increased than diminished. Every sand-hill came originally from the bottom of the sea; and every addition, vacillate as it may in place, must come from the same fertile source. That this is often the fact, is very certain; since on many seashores large tracts of land are actually produced in this manner.

Though there should not be much gain, however, in the extent of the land, there seems to be a steady acquisition in regard to its value. On a superficial view, it would appear—as it must do to the tenants who may chance to suffer—that the whole process is injurious; as, unquestionably, many spots, once fertile, are

the quality, so long as the dose of stimulant is strong and stiff.

The typical tourist, who goes into ecstasies over the Trossachs and crawls wondering under the basaltic

rendered barren, at least for a time. But while those who lose complain, the gainers, as usual, do not boast. The sand, in its progress, serves to fertilise a more distant spot, while it may suffocate that one on which it rests too abundantly. Thus the loss of one farm, in point of fertility as in extent, becomes the gain of another; and the advantages and disadvantages are perpetually transferred from the hand of one tenant to that of his neighbour. But the proprietor is always gaining; as the extent of the improved land is far greater than that of the injured. Not only here, but in South Uist, in Barra, in Coll, in Harris, in Colonsa, and in many other places, the winds sweep the sand far into the interior, till it is checked by the hills; where meeting with moisture by which it is fixed, and peat to which it is a perpetual and ever-renovated manure, it brings on a coat of verdure where nothing grew before but heath; whence that which, on the flat and arid shores, is the cause of small spots of barrenness, is, in its progress, the source of extensive fertility. The springing of white clover is one among the results which prove this good effect, as that is an invariable result of the application of calcareous matter to Highland pastures. The proprietors have not hitherto been aware of the nature of this process, of so much importance in the agriculture of these islands. They have forgotten to note the difference between their own lands and those which sand injures; judging by habit, and forgetting to observe or reason. It is proper for them to recollect that the transference

columns of Staffa, would not, perhaps, be particularly stimulated at first by a pull up one of the numberless fjords which eat their winding way into the eastern coasts of the Outer Hebrides. The far-off hills around Skipport and Maddy are not tall enough for such a modern, and the sea is dull, not being sensational, but old-fashioned. We, on the other hand, who find it unnecessary to rush far for wonders, and who are apt to be blind to nature's more obtrusive beauties, have a greater liking for these quaint old fjords than for the showy Trossachs or the splendid Glencoe. To float through them alone, in a small boat, on a quiet summer gloaming, is marvellously strange and eerie; for they are endless, arm growing out of arm just as the bourne seems reached; winding and interwinding, sometimes only a few feet in depth, at others broad and deep—and at every point of vantage there is something new to

of even common sand may thus be sometimes useful, far more than which is of a calcareous nature. They may cease to be so anxious in checking the sand inundation; whenever, at least, the position of the ground is such as to enable the prevailing winds to dispose of it in the manner in which it seems most evidently to be distributed in North Uist.

look upon. Some idea of the windings of the tides may be gained from the statement that Loch Maddy in North Uist, although covering only ten square miles, possesses a line of coast which, measuring all the various islands, creeks, and bays, has been calculated to ramify over three hundred miles. For picturesque sea depths, swarming with rare aquatic plants, and for variety of strange sea-birds, these fjords are unmatched in Britain; and they are characterised by wonderful effects of sun and mist, rainbow apparitions, fluent lights and shadows. Pleasant it is, in still weather, to lean over the boat's side and watch the crystal water-world in some quiet nook, vari-coloured with rocks, weeds, and floating tangle, and haunted by strange images of life. You are back in the great crustacean era, when man was not. Innumerable shell-fish, many of rare beauty, surround you; wondrous monsters, magnified by the water, stare at you with their mysterious eyes, till Humanity fades out of sight. When you raise your head, you are dazzled, and almost tremble at the new sense of life.

Ever and anon, in the course of these aquatic

rambles, you meet a group of kelp-burners gathered on a headland or promontory; and a capital study it would make for an artist with some little Rembrandtish mastery over the shadows. Clouding the background of cold blue sky, the thick smoke rises from their black fire, and the men move hither and thither, in and out of the vapour, raking the embers together, piling the dry seaweed by armsful on to the sullen flames. As they flit to and fro, their wild Gaelic cries seem foreign and unearthly, and their unkempt hair and ragged garments loom strangely through the foul air. On the hill slope above them, where a rude road curves to the shore, a line of carts, each horse guided by a woman, comes creaking down to the weed-strewn beach to gather tangle for drying. The women, with their coarse serge petticoats kilted high and coloured handkerchiefs tied over their heads, stride like men at the horses' heads, and shriek the beasts forward.*

* The manufacture of kelp, although depreciated infinitely in value since Government took the duty off Spanish barilla, is yet carried on to a large extent. The process is very simple—that of burning the seaweed in stone ovens until it leaves the solid deposit called kelp in the raw state; but care and experience are

Standing on Kenneth Hill, a rocky elevation on the north side of Loch Boisdale, and looking westward on a summer day, one has a fine glimpse of Boisdale and its lagoons, stretching right over to the

required to produce the best article. MacCulloch, writing in 1824, speaks thus of the kelp manufacture, and manages, being committed to simple detail, to keep pretty much to the point:—

“As the price of kelp varies in the market, the revenues of the proprietors are subject to fluctuations from which the labourers are exempt. When first wrought, and down to the year 1760, the price reached from 2*l.* to 5*l.* per ton; the expenses being then far less than at present. In 1790, it was at 6*l.*; whence, as the succeeding war checked the importation and raised the price of barilla, it rose to 11*l.*, 12*l.*, 15*l.*, and, for a short period, to 20*l.* Valuable, therefore, as this species of property may be, it is extremely unsteady; while it is also precarious, as any great increase in the produce of foreign barilla, the removal of the duties, or the discovery of the long-attempted problem to decompose sea-salt by a cheap process, might extinguish it in a moment. Where the interests are so few, and the total advantages so limited, it could scarcely expect protection from restrictive laws. I must now indeed add, that between the period of writing and printing this, the duties on barilla have been diminished, but that an after suspension of the law has also taken place. Hence it becomes unnecessary further to alter what I had written; while the present view will tend to show what the effects of the loss of this manufacture are likely to be on the insular population, and how necessary it is that some equivalent, if temporary, relief should be given.

edge of the Western Ocean, five miles distant. The inn and harbour, with the fishing-boats therein, make a fine foreground, and thence the numerous ocean

“If this manufacture was once ill understood and worse managed, it seems now to have attained all the perfection of which it is susceptible. June, July, August, and part of September, form the period of this harvest. The drift weed thrown on shore by storms is sometimes used; but, if much injured, it is rejected, as in this state it is found to yield little salt. This kind consists chiefly of tangles, as they are here called, or *Fucus saccharimus* and *Digitatus*, which, at all times, contain less soda than the harder species, and are also much better adapted for manure. The latter consists chiefly of four, the *Serratus*, *Digitatus*, *Nodosus*, and *Vesiculosus*; and these are cut at low water from the rocks on which they grow. As the value of a kelp estate depends on the magnitude of the crop, it is therefore regulated principally by three circumstances; namely, the linear extent of the shores, the breadth of the interval between high and low-water mark, consisting in the length of the ebb or fall of the tide and the flatness of the beach, and the tranquillity of the water or its shelter from the surge: to which may be added, the nature of the rocks, as some kinds are found to favour the growth of the plants more than others. It has been attempted to increase the extent of this submarine soil by rolling stones into the water; but I believe that the success has never repaid the expense. On some estates, this harvest is reaped every second year; on others, only every third; nor does it seem to be agreed what are the comparative advantages of either practice.

“The weeds, being cut by the sickle at low water, are brought on shore by a very simple and ingenious process. A rope of



fjords, branching this way and that like the stems of seaweeds, stretch glistening westward into the land. A little inland, a number of huts cluster, like beavers'

heath or birch is laid beyond them, and the ends being carried up beyond the high-water mark, the whole floats as the tide rises, and thus, by shortening the rope, is compelled to settle above the wash of the sea, whence it is conveyed to the dry land on horse-back. The more quickly it is dried, the better is the produce: and, when dry, it is burnt in coffers, generally constructed with stone, sometimes merely excavated in the earth. In Orkney, the latter are preferred. It has been attempted, idly enough, to introduce kilns; a refinement of which the advantages bear no proportion to the expense; as in the ordinary mode the kelp forms its own fuel. As twenty-four tons of weed, at a medium, are required to form a ton of kelp, it is easy to conceive the labour employed for this quantity, in the several processes of cutting, landing, carrying, drying, stacking, and burning.

“In general, the kelp shores are reserved by the proprietor, who thus becomes the manufacturer and merchant. If, in some points of view, this is a questionable piece of policy, it is a practice not easily avoided. The farms of the great bulk of the tenants are too small to allow of their managing the kelp to advantage; nor would it be easy to find a responsible lessee for this part of the estate alone. As there is no class of labourers in this country, the work must also be performed by the small tenants. These, however, are not paid by money wages; but, being the tenants on the estate itself, a portion of their rent is thus imposed and received in the form of labour. Thus, two pounds a year, and the manufacture of a ton of kelp, will represent the average rent of a farm here, valued at five pounds.”

houses, on the site of a white highway; and along the highway peasant men and women, mounted or afoot, come wandering down to the port. Far as the eye can see the land is quite flat and low, scarcely a hillock breaking the dead level until the rise of a row of low sandhills on the very edge of the distant sea. The number of fjords and lagoons, large and small, is almost inconceivable; there is water everywhere, still and stagnant to the eye, and so constant is its presence that the mind can scarcely banish the fancy that this land is some floating, half-substantial mass, torn up in all places to show the sea below. The highway meanders through the marshes until it is quite lost on the other side of the island, where all grows greener and brighter, the signs of cultivation more noticeable, the human habitations more numerous. Far away, on the long black line of the marshes, peeps a spire, and the white church gleams below, with school-house and hovels clustering at its feet.

A prospect neither magnificent nor beautiful, yet surely full of fascination; its loneliness, its piteous human touches, its very dreariness, win without

wooding the soul. And if more be wanted, wait for the rain—some thin cold “smurr” from the south, which will clothe the scene with gray mist, shut out the distant sea, and brooding over the desolate lagoons, draw from them pale and beautiful rainbows, which come and go, dissolve and grow, swift as the colours in a kaleidoscope, touching the dreariest snatches of water and waste with all the wonders of the prism. Or if you be a fair-weather voyager, afraid of wetting your skin, wait for the sunset. It will not be such a sunset as you have been accustomed to on English uplands or among high mountains, but something sullener, stranger, and more sad. From a long deep bar of cloud, on the far-off ocean horizon, the sun will gleam round and red, hanging as if moveless, scarcely tinting the deep watery shadow of the sea, but turning every lagoon to blood. There will be a stillness as if Nature held her breath. You will have no sense of pleasure or wonder—only hushed expectation, as if something were going to happen; but if you are a saga-reader, you will remember the death of Balder, and mutter the rune. Such sunsets, alike yet ever different, we saw, and they are not to

be forgotten. Then most deeply did the soul feel itself in the true land of the glamour, shut out wholly from the fantasies of mere fairyland or the grandeurs of mere spectacle. The clouds may shape themselves into the lurid outlines of the old gods, crying,

Suinken i Gruus er
Midgarðs stad !

the mist on the margins of the pools may become the gigantic witch-wife, spinning out lives on her bloody distaff, and croaking a prophecy ; but gentler things may not intrude, and the happy sense of healthy life dies utterly away.

Pleasant it is, after such an hour, to wander across the bogs and marshes, and come down on the margin of a little lake, while the homeward passing cattle low in the gloaming. You are now in fairyland. With young buds yellow, and flowers as white as snow, floating freely among the floating leaves, the water-lilies gather, and catch the dusky silver of the moon. The little dab-chick cries, and you see her sailing, a black speck, close to shore, and splashing the pool to silver where she dives. The sky clears, and the still spaces between the lilies glisten

with stars, whose broken rays shimmer like hoarfrost and touch with crystal the edges of leaves and flowers. You are a child at once, and think of Oberon.

Neither more nor less than we have described them are the Outer Hebrides; a few mountains, endless stretches of peat bogs and small lagoons, a long tract of shell-sand hillocks, all environed, eaten into, and perpetually shapen afresh by the never-resting sea—

“ Hebrid isles,
Set far amid the melancholy main.”

Like all such children of the sea, they flit from mood to mood, sometimes terrible, sometimes miserable, peaceful occasionally, but never highly gay. Half the year round they are misted over by the moist oceanic rains—in winter the sea strews them anew with seaweeds, shells, and drift timber—and for a few days in the year they bask in a glassy sea and behold the midsummer sun.

The rafters of most of the dwellings on the seashore are composed of the great logs of drift-wood which find their way over the ocean to the western

coasts—mighty trees, with stumps of roots and branches still remaining, wafted from the western continents. Many of these trunks are covered with the foliage of seaweed, and adorned with barnacles—which, it is still popularly believed, are geese in the embryo. Others are the masts and yards of ships.

As has before been noted, the people of these isles are very poor. Their chief regular occupation, not a very profitable one now, is the manufacture of kelp; but they work during a portion of the year at the cod, ling, and herring fisheries. At certain seasons of the year, they reap an excellent harvest out of the cuddies, or young lithe, which appear on the coast in numbers nearly as great as the herring fry. They are taken by thousands in long bag nets tied to the end of a long pole. In hard times the people subsist almost entirely on shell-fish, such as cockles and mussels, which abound on the endless sea-coast. Most of them have small crofts, and a few of them are able to keep cows. Here and there reside wealthy tacksmen, who rent large farms, employ a good deal of labour, and people the wastes with cattle and sheep. These tacksmen

rule the land with quite arbitrary sway. In their hands lies the welfare of the population. Many of them appear to be honest kindly men, but there are evidences that some of them still keep their dependents as "scallags," in virtual slavery.

Walk from one end of the Uists to the other and you will not meet a smiling face. It is not that the people are miserable, though they might be happier; nor is it that they are apathetic, though they could be more demonstrative. With one and all of them life is a solemn business; they have little time for sport—indeed, their disposition is not sportive. You must not joke with them—they do not understand; not because they are stupid, not because they are suspicious of your good faith, but merely because their visions, unlike the visions of brilliant races, are steady rather than fitful—seeing the world and things under one changeless ray of light, instead of by wonderful flashes. From the beginning to the end they have the same prospect, without summer, without flowers. Wild mirth-making in such a world would look like mountebanking among graves.

Yet how tender they are! how exquisitely fresh

and kind! They are the most home-loving people in the world; that is one of the chief reasons why they do not venture more on the water at greater distances from the family croft. One meal under the dear old roof, with the women and the little ones gathered aroundabout, is sweeter than a dozen at a distance or on board ship; hard fare and sorry sleeping in a hut on the waste, where the wife can rear her young and the old mother spin in the ingle, is to be preferred to fine service and good clothes anywhere else in the world. There is an old Gaelic saying common here, "A house without the cry of bairns is like a farm without kye or sheep." Next to this love of home, this yearning to be the centre of a little circle, there dwells in the people of the islands a passionate fondness for localities. Uist is brighter to most than any promised land, however abundant the store of milk and honey. They know the place is bare and desolate, they know that it becomes a sore, sore pinch to live on the soil, but they know also that their fathers lived here before them, wedded here, died here, and (they fervently believe) went virtuously to heaven from here. True,

some of the younger and livelier spirits express their willingness to emigrate, and do emigrate occasionally, exhibiting under the influence of liquor plentifully distributed all the signs of exhilaration; but such are exceptions, corrupted youngsters, caught too early by the yellow itch of gold. Nothing is more noticeable in these islands than the demoralising influence of civilisation on the race. The farther one recedes from the seaports, from the large farms of the wealthy tacksmen, from the domain of the shopkeeper and the schoolmaster, the brighter do the souls of the cotters grow, the opener their hands, the purer their morals, and the happier their homes. Whenever the great or little Sassenach comes, he leaves a dirty trail like the slime of the snake. He it is who abuses the people for their laziness, points sneeringly at their poor houses, spits scorn on their wretchedly cultivated scraps of land; and he it is who, introducing the noble goad of greed, turns the ragged domestic virtues into well-dressed prostitutes, heartless and eager for hire. In the whole list of jobbers, excepting only the "mean whites" of the Southern States of America, there

are few paltrier fellows than the men who stand by Highland doors and interpret between ignorance and the great proprietors. They libel the race they do not understand, they deride the affections they are too base to cultivate, they rob and plunder, and would exterminate wholly, the rightful masters of the soil. They are the agents of civilisation in such places as the Outer Hebrides; so that, if God does not help the civilised, it is tolerably clear that the Devil will.

In the islands, beware of the civilised. The cultivated islander, like the Sassenach, gives you nothing in kindness, charges you double for everything, and sees you go without any grief save that of half-satisfied greed. Recollect, nevertheless, that he is doing well, tills his ground well, and by-and-by, perhaps, will keep a little store, going on from little to big trading, till he owns both land and boats. The poor uncivilised islander, on the other hand, makes you welcome to his hearth, gives you "bite and sup" of the best, talks to you with free heart and honest sympathy, and is only hurt and pained if you try to repay hospitality with money. No

matter how poor the hut, the stranger must have something—if not a drink of milk, the croft being too poor to support a cow, at least a draught of water in a clean basin. And the smile that sweetens such gifts is like Christ's, turning water into wine. We shall not soon forget the pain and indignation of an old islander, while telling of his experience once in the Lowlands. He had been walking far, and was very thirsty, when he descried a snug cottage, with a clean, sonsy housewife standing on the threshold. "Good wife," he said, after the usual greeting, "I am very dry, can you give me a drink of milk?" "We have nae milk," was the reply. "A drink of water then," said the wanderer. "Aweel," said the woman, "if you like I'll show ye the *well*, but we *hae to fetch the water oursel's!*" "My father and my mother," said our informant, after recounting the anecdote—"my father and my mother would have risen screeching from their graves, had I greeted the stranger at their door with such a speech."

Such are some of the people's virtues—philoprogenitiveness (rather a doubtful virtue this in the eyes

of some political economists!), honesty, hospitality. Note, too, a few of their faults, or, as some would say, their vices. Their staunchest friend cannot say that they are over-clean. They will sometimes litter like pigs, when by a little trouble they might live like human beings; and they do not always comb their hair. Then, again, they don't and won't go in for 'improvements.' The house their parents lived in is good enough for them—a herring-barrrel is good enough for a chimney, clay is good enough for a floor. They would feel chilly in a bigger dwelling. They are used to the thick peat-smoke, the pig by the fire, the hens on the rafters—perhaps, too, in the season, the calf in a corner. A philosopher may say—“Why not?”

One picture of a cottage may be as good as a dozen. Imagine, then, a wall, five or six feet thick, tapering inwards, and thereon, springing about a foot within the outer edge of the wall, a roof of turf and thatch, held down by heather ropes set close together, and having at either end great stones about twenty pounds in weight. The interior is divided by a wooden partition into two portions, the “but” and

the "ben." The calf is in a corner, and the hens roost on the beams overhead. The floor is clay, baked hard with the heat of the peat fire. The roof is soot-black, having a hole in the top, with a herring barrel for a chimney. From the centre descends a heavy chain, with a hook at the end whereon to hang the great black kettle. The mistress of the house squats on her hams at the door, and, leaning her cheek on her hands, watches you approach. The pig is paddling in the puddle close by. Perhaps, if the house is prosperous, the pony is grazing at a short distance, with his forelegs tied, to prevent his running away.

A stranger, wandering here, will be struck by the fact that, although the dwellings are so wretched, the dress of the poor inhabitants is remarkably good, showing few signs of poverty. Almost all wear homespun, and as much of it as possible—stout, coarse tweeds for the men, and thick flannels for the women. Nearly every house has a spinning-wheel, many houses possess a loom; a few have both; and a busy sight it is to see the comely daughter working at the loom, while the mother spins at her side, and even the man knits himself a pair of stockings while he

smokes his pipe in the corner. The men, as well as the women, are excellent weavers.

Another point that will strike a stranger, in the Uists especially, is the enormous number of ponies. Where they come from, what they are useful for, we have been unable to find out; but they literally swarm, and must be a serious encumbrance to the population. We were offered a splendid little filly for thirty shillings.

Thus far nothing has been said of the deep inner life of this people. Little as we have seen, and less as we understand, of *that*, we see and understand enough for great emotion. Put the spiritual nature aside in estimating capabilities, and you exclude all that is greatest and most significant. Now, directly the mental turn of the islanders is apprehended, it is clear at a glance why they must inevitably sink and perish in the race with the southerner or east-countryman. They are too ruminant by nature, too slow to apprehend new truths. They are saddened by a deep, clinging sense that the world is haunted. They have faith in witchcraft, in prophecy, in charms. If a stranger looks too keenly at a child,

they pray God to avert "the evil eye." They believe that gold and gems are hidden in obscure corners of the hills; but that only supernatural powers know *where*. They have seen the "Men of Peace," or Scottish fays, with blue bonnets on their heads, pushing from shore the boat that is found adrift days afterwards. Some of their old women retain the second sight. Strange sounds—sometimes like human voices, at others like distant bagpipes—are heard about their dwellings when any one is going to die. They tremble at the side of "fairy wells." They have the Gruagach, or Banshee. In short, they have a credulous turn of mind, not entirely disbelieving even when they know the evidence to be very doubtful—for they aver that the world is fuller of wonders than any one man knows. In their daily life, at births, at weddings, at funerals, they keep such observances as imply a deep sense of the pathetic nature of human ties. The voices of winds and waters are in their hearts, and they passionately believe in God.*

* MacCulloch, writing in 1824, speaks of such superstitions as virtually extinct over all the Highlands. "The Highlanders,"

It is still the custom, in the Uists and in Barra, to gather together on the long winter nights, and listen to the strange stories recited by aged men and women. These stories have been handed down from generation to generation, and are very curious indeed, dealing with traditions obviously originating in pre-historic periods.* The listeners know all about Ossian and Fingal, and regard them almost as real beings. Here and there in the islands reside men famous for their good stories, of which they are very proud. Some of them are familiar with ancient

he says, "now, believe as much as their Pictish and Saxon neighbours;" and he proceeds, in his usual silly fashion, to rake up all the large names he can muster, for the purpose of showing that their superstitions were always plagiarisms of the most commonplace kind. With his usual felicity in quoting at random, he throws no light whatever on the subject. We wonder if he ever came in contact with a Celt of the true breed. Doubtless; but lacking insight, he saw no speculation in the visionary eyes. Even a long night's talk with Hamish Shaw would have had no effect on this queer compound of pedantry and skittishness—this man of prodigious Latinisms and elephantine jokes. Yet his letters were addressed to Walter Scott, who was doubtless much edified by their familiarity and endless verbiage.

* For a full feast of Highland legends of the traditional kind, consult Mr. Campbell's 'Popular Tales.'

poems, full of sea-sounds and the cries of the wind. With these stories and poems—tales of enchanted lands and heavenly music—they keep their hearts up in a desolate and lonely world; but on all such subjects they are very silent to the stranger, until he has managed to win their confidence and disarm their pride.

With such a people religion is naturally a vital thing, important as life itself. The poor women will travel miles on miles to hear mass, or (if Protestants) to take the communion. It is held an evil thing to miss religious ceremonial on the Sabbath. In all affairs of joy or sorrow there is one straight appeal to the Fountain-head—the Lord God who reigns in heaven. Dire is the suffering that can be borne when the sufferer is told by the priest that it is “God’s will.”

What dullness! what a civilisation! How inferior are these benighted beings to their instructors—the petty tradesmen and the small factors! How blessed will the islands be when the present demoralising influences are withdrawn, and the paupers possess in their place the huckster’s scales and the grocer’s tallow-candle!

CHAPTER IV.

SPORT IN THE WILDS.

Sealguir thu mar a mharbhas thu Gàadh a's Corr' a's Crotach.
 —“O sportsman, when killest thou goose, and heron, and curlew?”—*Highland Proverb.*

The Sportsmen and their Dog—The Hunter's Badge—The Weapons—Shooting in the Fjords—Eiders, Cormorants, Curlews—Duck Shooting near Loch Boisdale—The *Tern* at Anchor in Loch Huport—Starvation—Wild Goose Shooting on Loch Bee—The Shepherd's Gifts—Goose Shooting on Loch Phlogibeg—The Melancholy Loch—Breeding Places of the Wild Fowl—Rain—Storm—“Bonnie Kilmeny”—Short Rations—The Passing Ship—Red Deer, Salmon, and Eagles—Corbies and Ravens—Seal Shooting in the Maddy Fjords—Reflection on Wild Sports in General.

If the gentle reader be a sportsman of the usual breed, serious, professional, perfect in training, a dead shot at any reasonable distance and at any object, from a snipe to a buffalo, it is with no

respectful feelings that he will hear of our hunting raids through the Highland wilds. We were three—the Wanderer, Hamish Shaw, and the dog Schneider, so named in a fit of enthusiasm after seeing Mr. Jefferson's 'Rip^{*} Van Winkle.' The Wanderer would have been a terrible fellow in the field if he had not been short-sighted, and in the habit of losing his spectacles. As it is, he was at least terribly in earnest, and could contrive to hit a large object if he did not aim at it with any particular attempt to be accurate. Hamish Shaw was not great at flying game, but he was mightily successful in sneaking up for close shots at unsuspecting and *sitting* conies, and his eye was as sharp as a backwoodsman's in picking up objects at a distance. The third member of the party, Schneider the dog, was of the gentler sex, wayward, wilful, for the lack of careful training during her infancy, apt to take her own way in hunting matters, until brought to a due sense of decorum by a vigorous application of the switch. She was, in fact, a noble specimen of the species Briggs, having been trained by the Wanderer himself, with the usual triumphant result in such

cases; so that, if no sheep caught her eye, and a keen watch was kept upon her movements, she could be depended on for a stalk or a chase quite as much as either of her masters. Though she could not point or set, she was a tolerable retriever, and few dogs of any kind could match her for long and steady labour in the water.

Now, it was the fixed determination of the Wanderer, on again roaming northward, once and for ever to prove his title to the hunter's badge by killing, according to the requirements of the old Highland formula, a Red Deer, a Salmon, an Eagle, a Seal, and a Wild Swan, every one of which he religiously swore to skin and stuff as eternal credentials, testifying unmistakably that he was a man of prowess in the field. All these, of course, had to be slain single-handed, unaided by any more complicated weapons of destruction than the rifle, the fowling-piece, and the rod. Cunningly enough, he had fixed on Uist and the adjacent islands as an excellent place to begin his labours, and perhaps achieve the crowning honours of them all. The red deer, he knew, were certainly not numerous there; but

the system of stalking them places the possibilities strongly in favour of the hunter, who lies securely hidden, close to one of the paths the game is sure to take when driven by boatmen from the adjacent small islands where they feed. Salmon were plentiful in the great lochs communicating with the sea, and in some of the larger rivers. The lesser seals swarmed at all times, while during winter even the great Arctic monster brooded on Haskair, and played splashingly at leapfrog through the Sound of Harris. Here and there, hovering over the inaccessible peaks, poised the eagle, in all the glory of his freedom, while the ravens croaked jealously on the shadowy crags below. As for the hoopers, solitary specimens had been known to alight on the lonely lochans even during the sunny season, and in winter the huge migratants landed in swarms—no very difficult mark for the hunter's bullet or "swan-post."

These were the mighty game, the hierarchy of the hunter's heaven, beautiful, distant, not readily to be won, until drawn down by the music of the whizzing ball. But the Wanderer was not proud; he had an

eye to lesser game, and being inoculated at that time with the least bit of the naturalist's enthusiasm, he longed greedily for additions to his museum. Wherefore the eider duck, and the merganser, and the grebe, and all the various tribes of sea-birds and land-birds, were carefully marked for addition to the list of specimens culled by that steadfast hand. Then there was the cabin-table to be catered for; and rapturously was it noted that wild-ducks and plovers, and moorfowl and conies, were numerous in all the islands, and that the monster wild-goose, a still more noble quarry, was breeding in seeming security in the hearts of all the greater moorland lochs.*

* In that curious and scarce little book on the Western Hebrides, published by the Rev. John Lane Buchanan in 1793, there is a marvellous account of the ornithological treasures to be found in the islands. The naïveté with which the reverend gentleman retails his wonders is very comical :—

“The species of land and sea-fowls over all this country,” he begins, “are too many to be mentioned in so limited a work as this. Tarmachans, plovers, blackbirds, starlings (or dimddan), red muir-cocks and hens, ducks and wild geese by thousands, particularly on the plains of South Uist and elsewhere; wood-cocks, snipes, ravens, carrion crows, herons, bats, owls, all kinds of hawks and eagles, so large and strong that they carry off

These were the weapons: a Snider rifle, a double barrel breech-loader, good for stopping small game on the hillsides; and a long shoulder

lambs, kids, fawns, and the weaker kinds of sheep and foals. They have been known to attack even cows, horses, and stags; and their nests are frequently found to be plentifully supplied with fish, which, in what are called plays of fish, they pick up from the surface of the sea.

“A species of robbery, equally singular and cruel, was lately practised in this country very commonly, and sometimes at this day, in which the eagles are the principal actors. The thieves, coming upon the eaglets in their nests, in the absence of their dams, sow up the extremity of the great gut; so that the poor creatures, tortured by obstructions, express their sense of pain in frequent and loud screams. The eagle, imagining their cries to proceed from hunger, is unwearied in the work of bringing in fresh prey, to satisfy, as he thinks, their craving appetites. But all that spoil is carried home by the thieves at night, when they come to give a momentary relief to the eaglets, for the purpose of prolonging, for their own base ends, their miserable existence. This infernal practice is now wearing fast away, being strictly watched by the gentlemen, and severely punished. Mr. Mackenzie, for every eagle killed in Lewis, gives a half-crown. One of those large eagles was taken in the Isle of Herries, at Tarbert, together with a large turbot, in which the animal had fastened its talons, when asleep, at the surface of the water, so as not to be able to disengage them. The eagle, with his large wings expanded like sails, drove before the wind into the harbour, where he was taken alive (his feet being entangled in the turbot) by the country people.

duck gun, Big Benjamin by name, good for any or everything at a hundred yards, and certain, if loaded with the due amount of shot and powder, to

“Birds of passage, of several kinds, are seen over all the isles. Swans, cuckoos, swallows, lapwings, plovers, &c., and wild fowls of several kinds, rendered tame, are often seen about the yards, dunghills, and doors of houses, among the poultry.

“The *Bishop Carara*, or *Bunubbuachil*, is larger than any goose, of a brown colour, the inside of the wing white, the bill long and broad. It dives quicker than any other bird. It was never known to fly, the wings being too short to carry a weight seldom under, but often above, sixteen pounds.

“The black cormorant is not held in much estimation by the islanders; but such as have white feathers in their wings, and white down on their bodies, are famous for making soup or broth of a delicate taste and flavour.

“The Western Hebrides abound in Soland-geese, sea-gulls, and singing-ducks, of a size somewhat less than of common ducks. They are constantly employed either in diving for sand-eels, which are of a speckled colour, like leeches, or in sitting together in flocks, and singing, which is heard at the distance of half a mile, and is accounted very pleasing music.

“The duck, called the *Crawgiabh*, is larger than a Muscovy duck, and almost tame—you may approach very near it before it takes wing—and is frequently kept by gentlemen among the other poultry.

“*Rain Goose*.—This fowl is always heard at a great distance before a storm; it is almost as large as a goose.

“*Drillechan*, or water-magpie.—This bird is larger than a land magpie, beautifully speckled, with a long, sharp, and strong

stretch low the unwary shooter with its sharp recoil. Then there was the rod, a slight thing, but clever and pliant, besides being very portable, and the six

bill, red as blood. It never swims, but flies from place to place, following the ebb, picking up spout-fish. They are silent during the flow of the tide, and begin to whistle the moment it turns.

“*Starnags*.—This bird appears in spring on these coasts, about the size of a hawk, with long, sharp-pointed wings, extremely noisy and daring. They are speckled; but the prevailing colour is white.

“*Fasgatar*.—This bird is of blackish blue, as large as a hawk, and is constantly pursuing the starnags through the air, to force them to throw out of their mouths whatever they have eaten; and the vile creatures catch every atom of what the others throw out, before it reaches the water. It will sometimes venture to sit on any boat, if the passengers have provisions and throw out any, by way of encouraging its approaches.

“*Wild Doves*.—Every cave and clift is full of wild doves.”

The above needs a little comment. The eagle story may be taken at its worth; but the Rain-goose and the Bishop Carara fairly puzzle us—unless by the latter is meant the Loon. The *Drillechan*, which has a bill “as red as blood,” and which whistles “at the turn of the tide,” is, of course, the little Seapie, or Oyster-catcher. The *Starnags* may be a species of gull, and the *Fasgatar*, the Herring Hawk, so hateful to honest fishers. As for the *singing duck*, the only bird at all answering to the description is the *ice duck*, whose strangely eerie cry is perhaps “pleasing,” but, assuredly, very melancholy.—“Calloo! calloo!” it moans aloud during windy weather, in a voice like the cry of a child in mortal pain.

or seven kinds of flies—the dark wild drake's wing with white tip being found the finest for trout in all those gloomy waters. Besides these, there was the telescope, taken in preference to a binocular field-glass, as being at once more powerful and more sportsmanlike; but voted a bore in the sequel, always getting lost if carried in the hands, and when slung over the shoulders by a strap, constantly dangling forward in the way of the gun when the shooter stooped, or suddenly loosening at the critical moment before firing, to scare the purposed victim away with a savage rattle!

There were two ways of hunting—on foot over the moors, and on water through the winding fjörds. Of the two, we preferred the latter—deeming it the more enjoyable and less wearisome to the body.

Floating hither and thither with the lugsail, a light air guiding the punt surely though slowly towards the victims, Hamish at the helm, Schneider fretting in the bottom, the Wanderer crouching with cocked gun in the bows, we soon accumulated specimens of the many species of ducks, the male and female eider, the black guillemot, the herring hawk,

the black scart and green shag, and the calloo. All and each of these birds we roasted and tasted after the skinning, having determined to give a fair trial to every morsel that fell to rod or gun; out of them all the only eatable birds were the eiders, and to devour *them* with a relish would require an appetite. As for the scart, angels and ministers of grace defend us from that taste again! The rakings of greasiest ship's pantry, the scrapings of the foulest cook's colander, mingled with meat from the shambles and stinking fish from the seashore, could not surpass its savour! Yet the fishermen praise it hugely, and devour it with greed. At St. Kilda, where the chief diet of the inhabitants consists of sea-fowl, and elsewhere over all the islands, the birds are prized as food exactly in proportion to their fishy and oily taste: the stronger the savour, the more precious the prize.

Of all common birds that fly, commend us to the curlew; for we are by no means of that tribe of sportsmen who like an easy prey, and in our eyes the more difficult the chase the more glorious the sport. The curlew has two noble qualities. Kept till

the right minute, cooked to a turn, delicately basted, and served with sweet sauce, it equals any bird that flies, is more delicate than the grouse, richer than the partridge, and plumper than the snipe. Then, still better, it is without any exception whatever the most difficult of all English birds to catch unawares, or to entice by any device within shooting distance. It is the watchman of birds, the shyest, the most vigilant, the most calculating. It knows better than yourself how far your gun can carry; and with how mocking and shrill a pipe it rises and wheels away, just as you flatter yourself it is within gunshot! Poor will be your chance at the wild duck on the shore, if the whaup be near; for his sharp eye will spy you out, as you crawl forward face downward, and at his shrill warning, "whirr" will sound the wings of the quacking flock, as they rise far over your head, and you rise shaking off the dirt and cursing the tell-tale. When a band of curlews alight, be sure that not one avenue of approach is unguarded; look with a telescope, and mark the outlying guards—one high up on a rock, another peering round the corner of a cliff, a third far up on the land,

and a last straggler perhaps passing over your own head with a whistle to his brethren. In all our sporting experience—and it has been long if not glorious—we have known only one of these birds to have been shot *sitting*; and this one was slain on a hillside by Hamish Shaw, who strapped his gun upon his back, and crawled through the heather on his stomach, like a snake!

Let the sportsman who has distinguished himself on the moors or among the turnip fields, and boasts loudly of his twenty brace, try his hand at a day's curlew shooting, and if on a first or second trial he bags enough dinner for a kestrel, we will call him the prince of shooters. In the breeding season only is it possible to shoot this bird easily, without an accurate knowledge of its habits, or much experience of its wary arts: but who destroys the bird-mother or her tender mate?

The Wanderer and Hamish Shaw slew many a whaup in the fjörds at Boisdale. Nowhere in the highlands were these birds so plentiful—they gathered in great flocks, literally darkening the sky; but nowhere, also, were they shyer and wilder, for the num-

berless pairs of eyes told hugely against the shooter. A little was done by seeking a concealed station, and having the birds driven as much as possible in that direction; but the most successful plan was to row the punt slowly to the spot where the birds thronged the rocks, with their heads and bodies all turned one way, and when they arose screaming, to run the chance of picking off solitary individuals at long distances. It was found that the curlew always felt himself perfectly safe flying at eighty or ninety yards; and, with careful shooting and proper loading, Big Benjamin could do wonders at that distance at any tolerably-sized bird *on the wing*.

In the greater inland lochs at Boisdale, while the *Tern* was lying in the harbour, the wild duck were plentiful, and they were vigorously hunted on two occasions by our sportsmen and the dog. It was not such easy work as duck-shooting often is, for all the shores of the lochs were covered with deep sedge and reeds, stretching out far into the water and affording safe cover to innumerable coots and dabchicks, as well as to the ducks themselves. Schneider, however, performed famously, swimming and forcing

his way through the green forest, till he startled many a bird to the open.

Enough of such ignoble chronicling of small beer. Whaups, wild-ducks, dabchicks—these are to be found on every moor and lochan south as well as north of the Tweed. But what says the reader to the wild goose? A more noticeable fellow surely, and well worthy of the sportsman's gun. Even far south in England, in severe weather, you have been startled by the loud "quack, quack, quack," above your head, and looking upward, you have seen, far up in the air, the flock flying swiftly in the shape of a wedge, wending God knows whither, with outstretched necks in noble flight. The tame goose, the fat, waddling, splay-footed, hissing gosling, all neck and bottom, is an eyesore, a monstrosity, fit only for the honours of onion-stuffing and apple-sauce at the Christmas season; but his wild kinsman is Hyperion to a satyr, noble as well as beautiful, winged like an eagle, powerful as a swan, not easily to be slain by Cockney gun, not easily to be surpassed in his grand flight by Cockney imagination. Now, we had long known that the wild goose bred in the wilds of Uist,

and we longed to take him in his lair; and pursue him we did at last, under circumstances most clearly warranting bird-slaughter, if ever such circumstances occurred in our chequered lifetime.

We had been storm-staid for a week in Loch Huport, a lonely sea-fjörd, about midway between Loch Boisdale and Loch Maddy, affording a snug anchorage in one of its numerous bays—Macpherson's Bay by name. So wild were the squalls for days, that we could not safely get on shore with the punt, although we were anchored scarcely two hundred yards from land. Now, by sheer block-headedness, having calculated on reaching Loch Maddy and its shops at least a fortnight before, we had run short of nearly everything—bread, biscuits, sugar, tea, coffee, drink of all kinds; and but for a supply of eggs and milk, brought off at considerable peril from a lonely hut a few miles away, we should have been in sore distress indeed. At last, the Wanderer and Hamish Shaw went off for a forage with guns and dog, determined, if all else failed, and they could not purchase supplies, to do justifiable murder on a helpless sheep. Though the wind was still high, they

sailed up Loch Huport with the punt and lugsail, and having reached the head of the loch, and drawn the boat up high and dry, they set off on foot with Big Benjamin and the double-barrel.

About five hundred yards distant, and communicating with Loch Huport by a deep artificial trench, nearly passable by a boat at high tide, lies another smaller loch of brackish water, which in its turn communicates through reedy shallows with a great loch reaching almost to the western ocean. Dean Monro, who visited the place long ago, speaks of the latter as famous for its red mullet—"ane fish the size and shape of ane salmont;" and it still abounds in both fresh-water and ocean fishes:

" For to this lake, by night and day,
The great Sea-water finds its way,
Through long, long windings of the hills,
And drinks up all the pretty rills,
And rivers large and strong." *

The smaller loch was only about half a mile broad, so the sportsmen determined to separate, each taking one of the banks; Hamish Shaw shouldering Big Benjamin, which was heavily charged with the

* Wordsworth's 'Highland Boy.'

largest drop shot, and the Wanderer the double-barrel. Shortly after the parting, the Wanderer saw an aged Celt, who was fishing for sethe with bait—coarse twine for a line, and a piece of cork for a float; and this worthy, after recovering from the shock of seeing an armed Sassenach at his shoulder, averred that there were plenty of “geeses” up the loch. “The geeses is big and strong, but she’ll only just be beginning to flee awa’”—a statement which we interpreted to mean that the young birds were fully fledged and able to rise upon their wings.

The shores of the loch were boggy and covered with deep herbage, with great holes here and there as pitfalls to the unwary pedestrian; and the Wanderer stumbled along for about a mile without seeing so much as the glint of a passing wing. At last, he perceived a small and desolate island, over which two black-backed gulls hovered, screaming at the sight of the stranger. From a corner of this island rose a duck, and sped swiftly, out of gunshot, down the water. The Wanderer waded, sure that it must wheel; and wheel it did, after flying five hundred yards, and passed back close over his head. Down it

came, plump as a stone. Alas! only a gool duck, with its buff breast and saw-toothed bill; and a mother too, for out from the weedy point of the island, diving in unconcern, paddled her five young, earning their own living already, though they were only wingless little lumps of down. The Wanderer bagged his bird disappointedly, for he had been on short rations for days, and had made sure of a mallard.

A cry from Hamish Shaw! He was standing across the water, pointing backward up the loch, and shouting out a sentence, of which only one word—"geese!"—was audible. The Wanderer crept stealthily to the water's edge, and espied a number of large birds seated on the water a quarter of a mile away. The telescope soon proving the blissful truth that these were "the geese," it was hurriedly arranged in pantomime that Hamish should creep back and press the birds gently forward, without approaching so close as to compel them to rise, while the Wanderer, with his dog, crouched behind a rock on the water's edge, ready to attack the unwary ones as they swam past. "To heel, Schneider—down!"

With burning eyes and panting breath, crouched the dog: for, thank heaven, it was one of her good days, and not a sheep was nigh.

It was one of those periods of awful suspense known only to the man who shoots—a quarter of an hour of agony—the knees soaking in muddy weeds, the perspiration rolling down the cheeks—an unaccountable and fiercely resisted desire to sneeze suddenly taking possession of the nose—one eye, in an agony, glaring command on the animal, the other peering at the approaching game. And now, horror of horrors! it is beginning to mizzle. The spectacles get misted over every minute, and they are wiped with a hand that trembles like an aspen leaf. Suppose the piece, at the last moment, should refuse to go off? A bad cartridge, on this occasion, means no less than semi-starvation! There they are—little more than a hundred yards away—a mighty gander, gray-headed and jaunty, leading the way, a female a few yards behind, then another gander and his wife, and lastly four fat young geese, nearly as big as their parents, but duller in their attire and far less curious in their scrutiny of surrounding

objects. Hush! the first gander is abreast of us—we have to hold down the dog by main force. We do not fire, for our hearts are set on the young brood; they will be tender—papa will be tough. Perdition! Schneider, driven to frenzy, and vainly trying to escape, utters a low and hideous whine—the old ganders and geese start in horror—they flutter, splash, rise—and there is just time to take rapid aim at one young goose, just dragging itself into the air, when the dog plunges into the water, and the whole portly covey are put to rout.

As the smoke of the gun clears away, all the geese are visible but one, which lies splashing on the surface, mortally wounded; him Schneider approaches to secure, but, appalled by a hiss, a beat of the wings, a sudden sign of showing fight, turns off and would retreat ignominiously to shore. She has never tackled such a monster since a certain eventful day when she was nearly murdered by another wounded bird, also a goose, but of a different kind—a solan, or gannet. Dire is the language which the Wanderer hurls at her head, fierce the reproaches, bitter the taunting reminiscences of other mishaps by

flood and field ; till at last, goaded by mingled shame and wrath, the dog turns, showing her teeth, despatches the foe with one fell snap, and begins trailing him to shore. Meanwhile, the Wanderer hears a loud report in the distance—crash! roar!—unmistakably the voice of Benjamin, adding doubtless to the list of slain.

Flushed with triumph, for at least one meal was secure, the Wanderer slung the spoil over his shoulder, patted the dog in forgiveness of all sins, and made his way over to the other side as rapidly as possible. Arrived there, he looked everywhere for Hamish, but saw no sign of that doughty Celt. At last his eye fell on something white lying among the heather ; and lo ! an aged gander, blood-stained, dead as a stone. Then, emerging from the deep herbage, rose the head of Shaw—a ghastly sight ; for the face was all cut and covered with blood. An old story ! Held in hands not well used to his ways, Big Benjamin had taken advantage of the occasion, and, uttering his diabolical roar, belging forwards and kicking backwards, had slain a gander, and nearly murdered a man at the same time.

A little water cleared away the signs of battle, but Hamish still rubbed his cheek and shoulder, vowing never to have any more dealings with such a gun so long as he lived. After a rest and a drop of water from the flask, tracks were made homeward, and just as the gloaming was beginning, the fruit of the forage was triumphantly handed over to the Cook on board the yacht.

Blessings do not come singly. By the side of the yacht, and nearly as big as herself, was a boat from shore, offering for sale new potatoes, fresh milk, and eggs. On board were a shepherd and his wife, who, living in an obscure bay of the loch, had only just heard of the yacht's arrival. The man was a little red-headed fellow, wiry and lissome; his wife might have passed for a Spanish gipsy, with her straight and stately body, her dark fine features and glittering black eyes, and the coloured handkerchief setting off finely a complexion of tawny olive. Kindly and courteous, hearing that a "lady" was on board, they had brought as a present to her two beautiful birds—a young male kestrel and a young hooting owl, which from that day became

members of the already too numerous household on board the *Tern*. The kestrel lives yet—a nautical bird, tame as possible, never tired of swinging on a perch on the deck of a ship; but the owl, christened “The Chancellor,” on account of his wig, disappeared one day overboard, and was in all probability drowned.

The shepherd was a mountaineer, and was well acquainted with the ways and haunts of birds. He knew of only one pair of eagles in that neighbourhood, and from his vague description, translated to us by Hamish Shaw, we could not make out to what precise species of eagle he referred. He had harried the nest that spring, but the young had died in his hands, and he was afraid the old birds would forsake the mountain. In answer to our questions about sport, he said that the small lochans close by attracted a large number of birds, but if we wished a genuine day of wild-fowl-hunting, we must go to Loch Phlogibeg, two miles in the interior, where the geese were legion. He recommended us to get the punt carried across the hills—a feat which might speedily be achieved by vigorous work on the part of four strong men.

As it was still too windy next morning to think of lifting anchor and urging the yacht farther on her journey up the open coast, the punt was taken to shore at an early hour by Hamish and the Wanderer; and an aged shepherd and his son, living in a cottage on the banks of the fjörd, were soon persuaded to assist in carrying the boat overland. It was warm work. The hills were steep and full of great holes between the heather, and the earth was sodden with rain which had fallen during the night. Fortunately, however, there intervened, between the sea and Loch Phlogibeg, no less than four smaller lochs, over which the punt was rowed successively, thus reducing the land journey from two miles to little more than half a mile. And lovely indeed were these little lochans of the hills, nestling among the hollows, their water of exquisite limpid brown, and the water-lilies floating thereon so thickly that the path of the boat seemed strewn with flowers. Small trout leaped at intervals, leaving a ring of light that widened and died. From one little pool, no larger than a gentleman's drawing-room, and apparelled in a many-coloured glory no upholsterer could equal,

we startled a pair of beautiful red-throats—but the guns were empty, and the prize escaped. There were ducks also, and flappers numberless—stately herons, too, rising at our approach with a clumsy flap of the great black wings, and tumbling over and over in the air, when out of the reach of danger, in awkward and unwieldy play.

What is stiller than a heron on a promontory? Moveless he stands, arching his neck and eyeing the water with one steadfast gaze. Hours pass—he has not stirred a feather; fish are scarce; but sooner or later, an eel will slip glittering past that very spot, and be secured by one thrust of the mighty bill. He will wait on, trusting to Providence, hungry though he is. Not till he espies your approach, does he change his attitude. Watchful yet still, he now stands sidelong, stretching out his long neck with a serpentine motion, till, unable to bear the suspense any longer, he rises into the air.

At last, all panting, we launched the punt on Phlogibeg. Delicious indeed, at that moment, would have been a drop of distilled waters, but the last whisky bottle had been empty for days, and was

not to be replenished in those regions. Having despatched the Highlanders homeward, with a promise from them to aid in the transport of the boat on the return journey next day, the Wanderer and his henchman prepared the guns and set off in search of sport.

Loch Phlogibeg is a large and solitary mere, in the heart of a melancholy place. Around it the land undulates into small hills, with bogs and marshes between, and to the south-east, high mountains of gneiss, with crags and precipices innumerable, rise ashen gray into the clouds. All is very desolate—the bare mountains, the windy flats, the ever-sombre ský. There is not a tree or shrub: instead of under-wood, stones and boulders strew the waste. The mere itself is black as lead: small islands rise here and there, heaped round with rocks and stones, and covered inside with deep rank grass and darnel. Everywhere in the water jut up pieces of rock—sometimes a whole drift-reef, like a ribbed wall; and at the western end are the ruins of a circular tower, or dune, looking eerie in the dim twilight of the dull and doleful air.

But now we are afloat, pulling against a chill moist wind. Hark! The air, which was before so still, is broken by unearthly screams. The inhabitants of the lonely place are up in arms, yelling us away from their nests and young. Look at the terns, pulsing up and down in the air with that strange spasmodic beat of the wings, curving the little black head downward, and uttering their endless *creaking croak*. Why, that little fellow, swift as an arrow, descended almost to our faces, as if to peck out our eyes; we could have struck him with a staff! Numberless gulls, large and small, white and dark, all hovering hither and thither, above our heads, now unite in the chorus; and two of the large black-backed species join the flying band, but, unlike the rest, voice their indignation only at long intervals. The din is frightful! all the fiends are loose! Yet numerous as are the criers in the air, they are only a fraction of the swarms visible in the loch—flocks of them sitting moveless on the island shores, solitary ones perching on the straggling rocks where they protrude through the water, others floating and feeding far out from land. See yonder mon-

ster gull, perched on a stone ; she looks huge as an eagle, with back as black as ebony, breast as white as snow, and large and glistening eye ; she does not move as we approach, but her frantic mate hovers above us and tries to scream us away. Though sorely tempted to secure so magnificent a bird, we spare her, partly for the sake of her young, partly (and more selfishly) for fear of frightening from the loch other and more precious game. Note the smaller and darker plumaged birds, paddling swiftly here and there close to the rocks ;—they are young gulls, recently launched out on the great water of life.

All this life only deepens the desolation of the mere. There is a hollow sadness in the air, which the weird screech of the birds cannot break.

But the geese—where are they ? Not one is visible as yet, we have not even heard a quack. Is it indeed to be a wild-geese chase, but only in the figurative sense, not literally ? No—for Hamish, with his lynx-like eye, has picked out the flock afar away ; he points them out again and again—there ! and there !—but the Wanderer, wipe his spectacles as

he will, can see nothing. With the telescope, however, he at last makes them out: a long line upon the water, numberless heads and necks. What a swarm! Surely all the geese of Uist have gathered here this day to discuss some solemn business! It is the very parliament of geese—grave, traditional—beginning and ending, like so many of our own parliaments, in a “quack.” Hush! Now to steal on them slowly with muffled oars. Some, the older birds, will rise, but surely out of all that mighty gathering a few will be our own!

As we approach, the geese retreat—they have spied us already, and wish to give us a wide berth. Two or three have risen, and winged right over the hill. Never mind! push forward. So swiftly do they swim, that the boat does not gain a foot upon them, but they cannot pass beyond the head of the loch up yonder, half a mile away, and there at least we shall come upon them. Hark! they are whispering excitedly together, and the result of the conference is that they divide into two great parties, one making towards a passage between some islands to the left, the other keeping its straight course up the mere.

Conscious of some deep-laid scheme to baulk us, we follow the band that keep straight forward—forty ganders, geese, and goslings, flying swiftly for life. Faster! faster! we are gaining on them, and by the time they reach that promontory, we may fire. Now they are beginning to scatter, some diving out of sight, and many rising high on wing to fly round the land. They have rounded the promontory, doubtless into some secret bay—not a bird is visible. Yes, one! For a miracle, he is swimming straight this way. His dusky plumage and crestless head prove him a juvenile; and surely nature, when she sent him into this world of slayers and slain, denied him the due proportion of goose's brains. Is he mad, or blind, or does he want to fight? He is only fifty yards away, and rising erect in the water, he flaps the water from his short wings and gazes about him with total unconcern. A moment afterward, and he is a dead gander.

Not a moment is to be lost; quick—round the promontory—or the flock will be heaven knows where. Too late! Not a bird is to be seen. We are close to the head of the loch, with a full view of all

the corners;—not a solitary feather. They cannot all be diving at the same time. Yet we can swear they did not rise on the wing; had they done so, we could not have failed to perceive them. Two score geese suddenly invisible, swallowed up in an instant, without so much as a feather to show they once were! Hamish Shaw scratches his head, and the Wanderer feels awed; both are quite unable to account for the mystery.

You see, it is their first real Wild Goose Day, and being raw sportsmen, actually accumulating their knowledge by personal experience, and utterly rejecting the adventitious instruction of books, they are unaware that the young wild goose, when sore beset in the water, has a sly knack of creeping in to shore, and betaking himself for the time being to the shelter of the thick heather or the deep grassy bog-hole. But now the mystery is clear; for yonder is the last of the stragglers, running up the bank as fast as its legs can carry it, and disappearing among the grass above. Tallyho! To shore, Schneider, and after it! The dog plunges in, reaches the bank, and disappears in pursuit. Running the

boat swiftly in to shore, we land and follow with the guns. Half running, half flying, screaming fiercely, speeds the goose, so fast that the dog scarcely gains on her, and, making a short sharp turn, rushes again to the water, plunges in, dives, and reappears out of gunshot. But his companions—where are they? Gone, like the mist of the morning. Though we search every clump of heather, every peat-hole, every watercourse, and though Schneider, seeming to smell goose at every step, is as keen as though she were hunting a rat in its hole, not a bird do we discover. Can they have penetrated into some subterranean cave, and there be quacking in security? Forty geese—vanished away! By Jupiter, we have been befooled!

Somewhat tired, we rest for a time on the water-side. The mere is silent again, untroubled by the screaming birds or the murderous presence of man. A drift-mist is passing rapidly against the upper parts of the mountains yonder, and the crags look terrific through its sickly smoke, and the wind is getting higher. Hark! Is that distant thunder? or is it the crumbling down of crags among the heights?

It is neither. It is the hollow moan of the western ocean, beating in on the sands that lie beyond these desolate flats. One feels neither very wise nor very grand, caught by such a Voice in the wilderness, caught—*hunting geese*. Had it been a red deer, now, or an eagle, or even a seal, that we were pursuing; but a goose—how harmonise *it* with the immensities? Of course it is merely association; for in point of fact the wild goose is a thoroughly noble bird, a silence-lover, a high soarer, an inhabitant of the lonely mere and desolate marsh, a proud haunter of the weedy footprints of the sea.

Yes, the wind is rising. Dark clouds are driving up to westward, and the surface of the mere begins to whiten here and there with small sharp waves. It looks like the beginning of a spindrift gale, but the weather is very deceptive in these latitudes, and it may mean nothing after all. It will be better, however, to be making tracks over the hills.

Up goes the lugsail, and we drive down the loch with frightful speed. Down with it; for the water is sown with rocks, and if we touch a stone while going at that speed, the punt's side will be driven

into splinters. We fly fast enough now, without sail or oar. Ha! yonder are the geese round that point, all gathered together again, and doubtless conversing excitedly about their recent terrific adventures. Before they can scatter much, we have rounded the point, and are down upon them. Bang goes Big Benjamin! Bang!—bang! goes the double-barrel. Four fine young birds are secured, two of them due to Ben the monster. We have just dragged them into the boat, when the rain begins to come down, while the wind is still flogging the water with pitiless blows.

And so, wet and weary, we drew up the punt in a sheltered creek, and turned her over. Hard by were some rude huts, built of peat turfs and wood—the summer abodes, or shielings, of the shepherds who bring their flocks over here for the pasture; and in one of these we left the oars, mast, sail, and other articles. Then shouldering our spoil, we put our backs to the wind and rain, and dashed along, through bog and over ditch, till we arrived at the shepherd's hut on the side of Loch Huport.

There, on the threshold, greeting us with a smile, was a Highland lass, in the clean short-gown and coloured petticoat, with hair snooded carefully and bare feet as white as alabaster. She was without doubt the sweetest maiden that we had yet met in our Highland rambles. Like her of whom Wordsworth sung—

“A very shower
Of beauty was her earthly dower;”

and it was ghostly beauty, the spiritual sweetening the earthly. The features were not faultless; the nose was perhaps a little inclined to heaven, but the eyes! What depth they had! What limpid serenity and far-searching thought! They were sorrowful eyes—had doubtless been washed with many tears. What struck us most about this creature was her strange whiteness and purity—her linen was literally like snow, her face was pale, her bare arms and legs were like marble—it was cleanliness almost oppressive, giving to her a wild fantastic influence, finely in keeping with those eerie wilds. If an artist could have seen this maiden, painted her in her habit as she lived, and written beneath “Bonnie Kilmeny,”

he would have been hailed as a great ideal painter. Jamie Hogg would have screamed and run, at seeing the heroine of his superb poem so incarnated, so sent to grace the wilds with witch-beauty :

“ Als still was her luke, and als still was her ee,
 Als the stillness that lay on the emeraut lee,
 Or the mist that sleips on a waveless sea . . .
 And O, her beauty was fayir to see,
 But still and steadfast was her ee !”

Yet we just now called her a maiden. Maid she was none, as we afterwards discovered, but a mother—the shepherd’s daughter-in-law. Whence, then, that maiden whiteness, so coldly spiritual? that alabaster body, so “purified from child-bed taint?” They were not of this earth; the woman’s soul, like Kilmeny’s, was in the “land of thocht,” and morning and even was washing the body clean in the delicate dews of dream.

Unfortunately, Kilmeny, as we mean to call her till the world’s end, “had no English,” and Hamish Shaw had to interpret for her pensive lips; but after all those deep eyes needed no interpreters—they told their own strange tale. It was

very commonplace, of course—would we have some milk? and had we had good sport? and was the Wanderer an Englishman? and whence had the yacht come? But the wretched hut, the thick peat-smoke—nay, even the ragged urchin in the corner—could not shake us out of a dream, such power had one exquisitely expressive face in startling the wayworn spirit and making it tremble. There was a message of some sort, a sudden light out of another world—what message, what light, was another question—but it was beautiful!

“She met me, Stranger, upon life’s rough way,
And lured me towards sweet Death; as night by day,
Winter by spring, or sorrow by sweet Hope,
Led into life, light, peace. An antelope,
In the suspended impulse of its lightness,
Were less ethereally light; the brightness
Of her divinest presence trembles through
Her limbs, as underneath a cloud of dew
Embodied in the windless heaven of June,
Amid the splendour-winged stars, the moon
Burns inextinguishably beautiful.”

Yes, that was it; she “lured towards sweet Death.” When the Wanderer thinks of her now, it is often with a cold chill—as of one *laid out*, in a

snowy winding-sheet, prinked with white lilies from the lochans. It is only a fancy, but the eyes still haunt him. Perhaps the woman is dead.

“Who is the goose now?” we hear the reader exclaim; and perhaps he is right. It was at all events a strange ending to our Wild Goose Day. The shepherd, with some difficulty, for the wind was high, rowed us in his clumsy skiff to the yacht, where we soon turned in, and dreamed about Kilmeny.

Two wild days of rain and wind had to pass away ere we could get across to Loch Phlogibeg for the punt. At last, however, we went over, shot a few more geese, and brought the punt back through a drenching mist. It only remains to be added that, with the assistance of Schneider and the hawk, we ate up every goose we slew, and if we had had something to swallow with the same, even a crust of bread or a biscuit, would have found the flesh delicious. But man cannot live on goose alone, however young, however tender. How did we crave a scrap of bread, and a drop of whisky, or tea, to wash it down!

Though we had goose galore, and eggs, and milk, that was all Loch Huport could do for us ; and, really, it might have been much worse, and we were ungrateful beings to crouch frowningly and mutter about starvation. Hamish Shaw was the bitterest, for he was out of tobacco, and to him, as to many another water-dog, life without tobacco was accursed torture. He had tried tea, till that was quite exhausted. Then he attempted a slice of boot-leather, and rather liked it—only, if he had persisted in smoking that kind of stuff, he would soon have had to go barefoot. The Wanderer recommended *peat*, but the idea was rejected with indignation.

Just as the weather was beginning to clear, a large ship put into the loch, for a rest after weeks of bad weather, and by boarding it we procured a few supplies—a little tea, some tobacco, and a number of weevil'd biscuits. Now, the presence of a large vessel acts like magic in a solitary place. No sooner had the ship entered the loch, than the region, which had previously seemed uninhabited, became suddenly populous, and numerous skiffs rowed out laden with natives. The skipper did what the

Yankees would call a "smart" thing with the natives on that occasion. Having need of hands to get in his anchors, which had dragged, he paid them off in biscuits of the finest quality, telling them to return next day, and (if they pleased) he would take in exchange for biscuits any quantity of *dried fish* they liked to bring. The natives were of course delighted, and the skipper secured a splendid lot of fish for the southern market. But conceive the disgust of the poor deluded Celts on examining their prize of dearly-coveted bread—for the biscuits were full of weevils, and worth scarcely a penny a pound.

"All this far you have been digressing!" cries the impatient reader. "We have heard more than we want to hear about ducks and geese, and hunger and thirst; but what of the red deer, the eagle, the salmon, the hooper, the seal?" Well, as to the red deer, we may or may not have been the death of many a forest king—their antlers may or may not be hanging over the chimney-piece in our smoking-room—but we did not get so much as a glimpse of a deer in the wilds of the Long Island. The salmon had not yet ascended the rivers, and the wild swans were rearing

that year's young in the distant north. More than one eagle we beheld, floating among the mountain peaks on the eastern coast, and dwarfed by distance to the size of a wind-hover; but mighty would have been the hunter who could reach and slay the sky-loving birds in their glory. Indeed, few have ever killed an eagle in its full pride of strength and flight. It is the sickly, half-starved, feeble bird that inadvertently crosses the shepherd's gun, and yields a lean and unwholesome body to the stuffer's arts. Such an one we saw low down on the crags of Ben Eval, passing with a great heavy beat of the wing from rock to rock, now hovering for an instant over some object among the heather, then rising painfully and drifting along on the wind. We had no gun with us that day, or we think that, by cautiously stalking among the heights, we might have made the bird our own; and, indeed, our hearts were sad for the great bird, with that fierce hunger tearing at his heart, while, doubtless, the yellow eyes burnt terribly through the gathering films of death. Out of the hollow crags gathered six ravens, rushing with hoarse shrieks at the fallen king, and turning away with horrible yells whenever

he turned towards them with sharp talon and opened beak; attracted by the noise, flocked from all the surrounding pastures the hideous hooded crows, with their sick gray coats and sable heads, cawing like devils; and these, too, rushed at the eagle, to be beaten back by one wave of the wrathful wings. It was a sad scene—power eclipsed on the very throne of its glory, taunted and abused by carrion,

“Sick in the world’s regard, wretched and low,”

yet preserving the mournful shadow of its dignity and kingly glory. Every movement of the eagle was still kingly, nor did he deign to utter a sound; while the crows and ravens were detestable in every gesture, mean, grovelling, and unwieldy, and their cruel cries made the echoes hideous. Round the shoulder of the hill floated the king, with the imps of darkness at his back. We fear his day of death, so nigh at hand, was to be very sad. Better that the passing shepherd should put a bullet through his heart and carry him away to deck some gentleman’s hall, than that he should fall spent yonder, in-

sulted at his last gasp, torn at by the fiends, seeing the leering raven whet his beak for slaughter, and the corby perched close by, eager to pick out the golden and beautiful eyes.

“ By too severe a fate,
Fallen, fallen, fallen, fallen,
Fallen from his high estate,
And welt'ring in his blood ;
On the bare earth exposed he lies,
With not a friend to close his eyes.”

We were not loath to see him go. It would have required a hard heart to take advantage of him, in the last forlorn moments of his reign.

Just as he passed away, there started out from the side of a rock a ghastly apparition, glaring at us with a face covered with blood, and looking as if it meant murder. It was only a sheep, and for the moment it amazed us, for it seemed like the ghost of a sheep, horrid and forbidding. Alas! though it glared in our direction, it could not see; its poor gentle eyes had just been destroyed, the red blood from them was coursing down its cheeks; and it was staggering, drunken with the pain. It was the victim of the hoody or the raven, ever on the watch

for the unwary, ready in a moment to dart down on the sleeping lamb or the rolling sheep, and make a meal of its eyes; then, with devilish chuckle, to track the blind and tottering victim hither and thither, as it feels its feeble way among the heights, until, standing on the edge of some high rock, it can be startled, with a wild beat of wings and a hoarse shriek, right down the fatal precipice to the rocks beneath; and there the murderer, while a dozen others of his kind gather around him in carnival, croaks out a discordant grace, and plunges his reeking beak into the victim's heart.

Though we slew a raven and half a dozen corbies, having after that night sworn a savage vendetta against the murderous kind, no eagle died by our hand—neither eagle, nor red deer, nor hooper, nor salmon. So far the search for the hunter's badge in Ultima Thule was a wretched failure, ending only in humiliation and despair. But we have at least taken one step in the right direction; for we can avow, by Diana and by Nimrod, or (if the reader likes it better) by the less classic shade of Colonel Hawker, that we killed a seal, and did so under circumstances

which may, we fancy, be quite as well worth relating as any other sporting matter recorded in these pages.

It was up among the fjörds of Maddy that the seal began to attract our attention. They were floating about in considerable numbers, coming quite close to the yacht at times, but always keeping well aloof whenever there was the slightest smell of powder. So one day the punt was got ready, Big Benjamin and the rifle put on board, and the Wanderer and his henchman started off up the fjörds.

There was a stiff breeze from the east, and the little boat shot swiftly with the lugsail through the inland waters. Every now and then the head of a seal popped up out of gunshot, floated for some minutes exactly like an oscillating leather bottle, and then was drawn slowly out of sight—still like a bottle, with the neck (or snout) upwards. The creeks were full of female eider and gool ducks, each female followed by five or six fluffs of down in various stages of development; and on one headland, which smelt as strongly of stale fish as a herring-boat, a whole covey of cormorants, sitting bolt upright, like parsons in black coats and dingy neckcloths, were

basking in the sunlight. The sea-larks twittered everywhere, the oyster-catchers whistled, the curlews screamed; and the gulls, scattered all around as thick as snow-flakes, completed the chorus with their constant cries.

There was a rocky point, well up the principal fjörd, which we had ascertained to be a constant resort of the seals, and on which, only the day before, an eye-witness had seen no less than forty, old and young, taking their noonday siesta all at once. Towards this point we ran with the fresh breeze, not firing a shot on the passage, but watching warily ahead; and at last, when in full view of the rocks and about a quarter of a mile distant, we hauled down the lugsail and "lay to" reconnoitring. Hamish Shaw's keen eye discovered seals at once, and the telescope soon showed that he was right. There they were, three or four at least in number, sunning themselves snugly on the very outermost rocks of the promontory, ready on the slightest alarm to slip like eels into the water. What was to be done? Shooting them from the boat was impossible; a nearer approach on the water would soon scatter them to

the deeps. However, by careful stalking, a good shot might be had from the land. About a hundred yards behind the siesta rise knolls of deep grass, intermingled with great boulders, and among these there must be many a capital point of vantage. Luckily, the knolls were well to leeward of the seals, and there was no chance of the wind playing traitor. Be it noted, that a seal, although not particularly sharp-sighted, has as fine a nose as a stag for any foul scent—such as that exuded, as Dean Swift vowed and as delicate animals know, by the murderous monster Man.

Leaving Hamish in charge of the punt, the Wanderer shouldered the rifle and made a long detour inland, not venturing to turn his face until he was well to leeward of his quarry. Then, strapping the rifle on his back in backwoodsman fashion, and throwing himself down on his hands and knees, he began crawling slowly towards the hidden point. Ah, my Grub Street friends, how little do ye think of the discomforts of the wilds! The ground was squashy as a sponge, and full of horrible orifices where the black rain-water gathered and grew stag-

nant. The Wanderer's knees were soon soaking, and ever and anon he plunged up to the elbows in a puddle treacherously covered with green. Be sure he muttered no blessings. Again and again he was on the point of rising erect, but was checked by the reflection that it was now impossible to mend matters, and that so much might be achieved by pushing on.

He was soon close to the knolls, which, instead of affording such good cover as he had anticipated, lay pretty well exposed to the view of the black gentlemen on the promontory. Ha! there they were, their tails cocked up in the air like a Yankee's legs, but resting on nothing. It was immediately quite clear that, to get within shot of all or any of them, the Wanderer must learn something from his ancient enemy the snake, and do the rest of the stalking on his stomach.

Did you ever try to perform this feat—to lie straight down on your face, keep your whole body and legs stiff, and wriggle yourself forward with your elbows and breast, just as you have seen the clown in the pantomime when he has designs on the pasteboard leg of mutton in the flat? If you are fat, don't

attempt it; it is fatiguing if you are lean. But add to the difficulties of the feat the inconveniences of doing it in a place as wet as a sponge, and thereby drenching your whole person with the green water of the damp morass, and you have some idea of the Wanderer's situation. Nothing daunted, however, he oozed — literally oozed — through the long grass, brushing the dirt with the tip of his nose, and glaring through his spectacles at the prey. Satan himself could not have managed better. The Wanderer had his reward, for the seals, unsuspecting of danger, remained motionless as stones.

Five were visible—three very large, two smaller—all seated less than a hundred yards away. Creeping behind a large rock, which afforded a tolerable rest for the rifle, the Wanderer breathed a space, for he was quite exhausted with his labour, and then prepared to fire. He trembled very much, partly with fatigue, partly with terror lest he might miss; but getting two in line, and aiming as steadily as his nerves would allow, he drew the trigger. A sharp crack, and all was over. The smoke curled up from the muzzle of the gun, and for a moment he thought

that he had missed. But no! all the monsters had disappeared but one, which was floundering wildly among the rocks, and making for the sea. The Wanderer rushed down, ready to finish the work with the butt end of his rifle, but before he could reach the spot the seal had plunged into the sea. Forgetting in his excitement to load again, he saw it rise and sink with short painful dives, and at last, with a deep breath, it turned over on its back, floundered, and sank in the bubbles of its own dying breath. By the time that Hamish came round with the punt no seal was there; and, indeed, the rascal seemed to receive with a look of incredulity the news that any one had even been hit at all. He rowed over the spot indicated, looking down for the white gleam of the seal's belly, but the water was very deep, and the slain one was lost beyond all hope of recovery.

That, reader, was the seal we slew. We certainly did not "bag" him, but we nevertheless accredit ourselves with the glory of his death; and no taunts of the ill-disposed shall make us change our opinion.

Having cleared the state-lounge of its occupiers,

and sought in vain for other loungers on shore, we determined to drift about, in the hope of getting chance shots from the boat. The water was full of seals, and the black heads were still coming and going in all directions. Now, it was a fixed and determined superstition of Hamish Shaw that the seal, being fond of music, can often be lured within gunshot by whistling; and it was a pretty sight, finely illustrating the pleasures of the imagination, to see the Wanderer and his henchman, guns in hand, whistling softly to attract the attention of some black head oscillating out of range. Neither being very musical, but producing a sound like the grating described by Milton on

“Scrannel pipes of wretched straw,”

their melody did not seem to have much effect; until suddenly, about fifty yards away, a gray old fellow popped his head through the water and stretched out his neck for a good stare in our direction. Shaw continued softly whistling, and both took aim and fired. There was a great splash in the water, and the seal was gone.

It is the opinion of a capital writer on field sports, Mr. John Colquhoun of Bute, that "all swimming seals, if hit at all, are shot through the head, and immediately spread out on the surface, giving ample time to row up and seize a flipper," and that consequently all stories of seals shot swimming, and suddenly submerged in deep water, are at the best exceedingly doubtful. It does indeed seem reasonable to avow that only the head of a swimming seal can be hit, the head being the only part visible; but the bullet may not necessarily reach the brain, and death may not be immediate.

Thus ended, not gloriously, our sport in the Wilds. None of the great trophies were won, though keen had been the chase, but something better had been gained—the fresh sense of new life. Cold and exposure, damp and hunger, rain and wind, daily acted as tonics to exhausted nature; and the Wanderer, who had swallowed enough iron to make a gun-barrel and enough strychnia to poison a boarding-school, was renewed like Æson by the rough process of nature herself. To the weary and exhausted, he recommends such a cure with con-

fidence. Fight with the elements from morn to night, fear neither cold nor wet, defy the elements—and the cure will come of itself. Nerve-exhaustion (nervousness is another thing, and means merely weakmindedness) is the one thing that must not be coddled and humoured.

There is another question, however, raised by the benevolent—the cruelty of sport as blended with the sorrow of things that feel. Now, we are not among those enthusiasts who avouch that the fox and hare enjoy being hunted, and that nothing is more glorious to a red deer than being shot on the hillside; and we will yield to no man in love for dumb things—we hold them so dear, and have so many of them around us, that we are laughed at by all our friends. Sport, be it granted, is a savage instinct, yet it is none the less a natural one. All true sportsmen love animals better than men who do not love sport. Well, as to wild shooting. It has in our eyes this grand recommendation—it combines a maximum of hard labour and skill with a minimum of slaughter; for, in the eyes of the wild shooter, a prize is precious precisely in proportion to the diffi-

culty of capture. Pheasant-shooting is like shooting in a hen-house, partridge-shooting is mere murder of the innocents, grouse-shooting is sometimes as bad; all these have for their main object the filling of an enormous bag. But in wild shooting, not only are you forced to contend with mountainous difficulties, and taken into scenes of extraordinary excitement, but you are amply satisfied with little or nothing as a recompense. One precious ornithological prize is "bag" enough for a fortnight. You cannot help admitting that some of your feelings and deeds are savage, but you have the satisfaction of knowing that the odds are always twenty to one against you, and that whatever you win is secured by a drudgery quite out of proportion to the value of the capture.

CHAPTER V.

COASTING SKYE.

Effects of Cruising on Yacht and Voyagers—Recrossing the Minch—North-West Coast of Skye—Becalmed off Lock Snizort—Midnight—Lights of Heaven and Ocean—Dawn—Columns of the North Coast—The Quirang—Scenery of the North-East Coast—The Storr—Portree Harbour.

DEVIOUS yet persistent as a crow, which flies wearily homeward against pitilessly beating rain and wind—now staggering along a good mile, now drifting backwards, overcome by some blast of more than common fury—the little yacht made her way along the rock-sown coast of the Long Island. All the elements seemed leagued against her, and we fitted along from anchorage to anchorage in a dense and rainy mist—literally “darkness visible.” Such a tiny, stubborn, desolate, rain-bedraggled, windstraw of a vessel never before ventured into

so inhospitable a region ; for the wild sea-weed grew upon her and trailed around her in slimy masses ; her sails were torn by the sharp teeth of the wind, her ropes rotted by the insidious and mildewy slime ; her once bright pennon was a rag ;— and altogether, but for the exquisitely delicate contour, which no dirt or raggedness could spoil, she might have been taken for some miserable wherry of the Isles. But the whirlwind spared her, the waves melted their wrath against her, and the beating rain only tightened her timber ; and, not to be daunted by Damp, Whirlpool, Hurricane, or any other of the Powers of that eerie region, she persisted in her explorations as devotedly as any little lonely lady in Wonderland. As for the voyagers, they had long since abandoned all attempts to look civilized. Their clothes hung upon them like those suits with which Jews tempt seafaring men in Whitechapel. Hamish Shaw's black corkscrew ringlets were wildly matted together, and his face was bristling all over. Even Schneider, the dog, looked disreputable ; for the salt water and sea air had taken all the gloss and curl out of her coat, and her poor eyes were closed

up with a sort of influenza. Not without pleasure, at last, did we turn homeward, leaving the Long Island to its loneliness and gloom.

Our first intention had been to cruise along the coast of the Outer Hebrides as far as Stornoway; but we had spent so much time in navigating the southern parts of the Long Island, that we paused at Loch Maddy, and after spending a week in examining the surrounding fjörds and islands, thought it high time to recross the Minch. It was now late in August, and the gales of wind were daily becoming more frequent in occurrence, longer-lasting, and stronger while they lasted. One morning, therefore, we left Loch Maddy with a brisk breeze from the north, and lying close to the wind, steered straight across the Minch, in the direction of the northern cliffs of Skye. Dim in distance, Skye loomed before us—the northern crags, the great heights of Dunvegan, Macleod's Maidens, and the shadowy Cuchullins,—and far away eastward the faint outline of the mainland was traceable for many a mile. The day was gray and dreamy, the wind steady as could be, the waves rising and falling with a deep

slumbrous murmur most assuring to the mariner. One had nothing to do but steer the boat, and let her work her way lightly and steadily over the easy waters, as they broke in dark foam-edged masses to the south.

Although there seemed little perceptible speed on the vessel, she gained mile after mile swiftly enough, and the mouth of Loch Maddy, with its rocky islands, began rapidly to mingle with the gray line of sea, while Skye grew darker and darker as we approached, the sleepy masses of mist gathering on all its heights as far as eye could reach.

Early in the afternoon we passed Dunvegan Head, and then Vaternish Point; but by this time the breeze had grown very faint indeed, and when we were in the middle of the great mouth of Loch Snizort, the wind ceased altogether. For hours we rolled about on a most uncomfortable sea, till the sun sank far away across the Minch, touching with red light the hazy outline of the Long Island. Then, all in a moment as it were, the eyes of heaven opened, very dim and feeble, and the night—if night it could be called—came down with a chilly sprinkle

of invisible dew. All round the yacht the sea burnt, flashed, and murmured, lit up by innumerable lights. Wherever a wave broke, there was a phosphorescent gleam. The punt astern floated in a patch as bright as moonlight; and every time the counter of the yacht struck the water the latter emitted a flash like sheet-lightning. The whole sea was alive with millions of miraculous creatures, each with a tiny light to pilot him about the abysses. Here and there the Medusa moved luminous, devouring the minute creatures that swarmed around it, terrible in its way as the Poulp that Victor Hugo has caricatured so immortally;* and other creatures of volition, to us nameless, passed mysteriously; while ever and anon a shoal of tiny sethe would dart to the surface and hover in millions around the yacht. Though there was no moon, the waters and the sky seemed full of moonlight. The silence was profound, only broken by a dull heavy sound at intervals—whales blowing off the headland of Dunvegan.

Midnight; and no breeze came. The sky to the north unfolded like a flower blossoming, and the

* 'Les Travailleurs de la Mer.'

northern lights flitted up from the horizon, flashing like quicksilver, and filling the sight with a peculiar thrill of mesmeric sensation. Lights gleaming on the ocean, the eyes of heaven glittering, the aurora flashing and fading—with all these the sense seemed overburthened. Now and then, as if the pageant were incomplete, a star shot from its sphere, gleamed, and disappeared.

There was nothing for it but to roll about on the shining sea till the wind came. Leaving Hamish at the helm, the Wanderer crept into the cabin, and was soon fast asleep, in spite of the lurching of the yacht. He was awakened by the familiar sound of the water rushing past a vessel under sail; and without opening his eyes he knew that the yacht had got a breeze. Creeping out into the cockpit, he saw the waters quite black on every side; darkness everywhere, save where the first cold sparkle of day was beginning to peep above the far-off mountains of the mainland.

We were in luck; for the breeze was from the north-west, and just enough for us to carry. When day broke, red and sombre, we were off Hunish Point, and saw on every side of us the basaltic

columns of the coast flaming in the morning light, and behind us, in a dark hollow of a bay, the ruins of Duntulm Castle, gray and forlorn. The coast views here were beyond expression magnificent. Tinted red with dawn, the fantastic cliffs formed themselves into shapes of the wildest beauty, rain-stained and purpled with shadow, and relieved at intervals by slopes of emerald, where the sheep crawled. The sea through which we ran was a vivid green, broken into thin lines of foam, and full of innumerable Medusæ drifting southward with the tide. Leaving the green sheep-covered island of Trody on our left, we slipt past Aird Point, and sped swift as a fish along the coast, until we reached the two small islands off the northern point of Loch Staffin—so named, like the island of Staffa, on account of its columnar ridges of coast. Here we beheld a sight which seemed the glorious fabric of a vision :— a range of small heights sloping from the deep green sea, every height crowned with a columnar cliff of basalt, and each rising over each, higher and higher, till they ended in a cluster of towering columns, minarets, and spires, over which hovered

wreaths of delicate mist, suffused with the pink light from the east. We were looking on the spiral pillars of the Quirang. In a few minutes the vision had faded; for the yacht was flying faster and faster, assisted a little too much by a savage puff from off the Quirang's great cliffs; but other forms of beauty arose before us as we went. The whole coast from Aird Point to Portree forms a panorama of cliff-scenery quite unmatched in Scotland. Layers of limestone dip into the sea, which washes them into horizontal forms, resembling gigantic slabs of white and gray masonry, rising sometimes stair above stair, water-stained, and hung with many-coloured weed; and on these slabs stand the dark cliffs and spiral columns: towering into the air like the fretwork of some Gothic temple, roofless to the sky; clustered sometimes together in black masses of eternal shadow; torn open here and there to show glimpses of shining lawns sown in the heart of the stone, or flashes of torrents rushing in silver veins through the darkness; crowned in some places by a green patch, on which the goat feed small as mice; and twisting frequently into towers of most fantastical device,

that lie dark and spectral against the gray background of the air. To our left we could now behold the island of Rona, and the northern end of Raasay. All our faculties, however, were soon engaged in contemplating the Storr, the highest part of the northern ridge of Skye, terminating in a mighty insulated rock or monolith which points solitary to heaven, two thousand three hundred feet above the sea, while at its base rock and crag have been torn into the wildest forms by the teeth of earthquake, and a great torrent leaps foaming into the sound. As we shot past, a dense white vapour enveloped the lower part of the Storr, and towers, pyramids, turrets, monoliths were shooting out above it like a supernatural city in the clouds.

Weary and exhausted as we were, we gazed on picture after picture with rapt eyes, looking little at Raasay, which was closing us in upon the left. At every hundred yards, the coast presented some new form of perfect loveliness. We were now in smooth water. The red dawn had grown into a dull gray day, and the wind was coming so sharp off the land that we found it necessary to take in a reef. We

had scarcely beaten into Portree, in the teeth of most severe squalls, when the bad weather began in earnest with some clouds from the north-west, charged like mighty artillery with wind and rain. Snug at our anchorage, we smiled at the storm, and heartily congratulated ourselves that it had not caught us off the perilous heads of Skye.

Portree is the capital of Skye, and, like all Highland capitals, is dreary beyond endurance, and without a single feature of interest. After lingering a day to rest our weary bodies, we left the harbour on a rather black-looking forenoon, with the intention of slipping down to Loch Sligachan, a distance of only some eight or nine miles, and of lying for a little time in the immediate neighbourhood of the wonderful Cuchullins. The little *Tern* had carried her mainsail nearly all the journey in the open, and now, for the first and second time, we lashed down the boom and put on the "trysail,"—just for the purpose of shifting comfortably down to Sligachan. Fortunate for us, as the event proved, that we did so!—for we left without a pilot, and were destined to be blown on somewhat sharply by the mighty Cuchullins.

The wind was ahead, and had fallen so much that the beating down was very slow work indeed; and we had therefore full leisure to examine all the fine "glimpses" in the narrow sound,—the mighty cliffs of Skye piled up above us on the starboard side, the undulating isle of Raasay to the left, the gigantic Storr astern, and Ben Glamaig rising darkly over the starboard bow. Nothing could be wilder and more fantastic than some of the shapes assumed by the Skye cliffs, nothing finer than some of their shadowy tints. Contrasted with them, Dun-Can of Raasay, on the top of which the oracular Doctor and Boswell danced a *pas de deux*, looked like a mere earthen sugar-loaf beaten flat at the top. All under Dun-Can stretched a brown and rocky country, pastoral and peaceful enough in parts, and having even green slopes and bright heathery glades— together with fine pieces of artificial woodland, through which glittered the waterfall—

“A silver pleasure in the heart of twilight!”

Strange looked the Storr behind us, rising solitary into the sky, with its satellite pinnacles and towers lying underneath in the dark blue shade.

Our eyes turned with most eagerness, however, towards Ben Glamaig, now scarcely visible in a thick purple mist. Cloud after cloud was settling on his summit, sinking lower and lower to mantle him from forehead to feet—and the long thread-like film of the falling rain was drawn down his darkness with faint gleams of light; yet the sea about us was quite quiet, and the wind was ominously still. Hamish Shaw cocked his eye up at the giant in true sailor-style, but delivered it as his judgment that “the day would be a fine day—tho’ we might maybe hae a *shower* ;” and Hamish had reason on his side, for the giants of Skye sometimes look very threatening when they mean no harm, and very friendly when they are drawing a great breath into their rocky lungs preparatory to blowing your boat to the bottom of the sea.

Altogether, it was with not quite comfortable feelings that we drew nearer and nearer to the mouth of Sligachan. The place bore an ugly name—there was danger above and danger under—rocks below and squalls above. Right across the mouth of Loch Sligachan stretches a dangerous shoal,

leaving only a passage of a few yards, and to sail through this at all it is necessary to have the tide in your favour. Then, as you enter, you must look out for "Bo Sligachan"—a monster lying in wait just under water to scrunch your planks behind his weedy jaws. Then, again, beware of *squalls*! Down the almost perpendicular sides of Ben Glamaig, down the beds of the torrents, inaudible till it has sprung shrieking upon you, comes the Wind. Talk about wind! You know nothing whatever on that subject unless you have been in a boat among these mountains. Huge skiffs have been lifted out of sheltered nooks made expressly for their reception—lifted up, twirled rapidly in the air like straws, and smashed to fragments in an instant. If a hen ventures to open her wings sometimes, up she goes in the air, whisks round and round for a moment, and comes down with the force of a bullet—dead. The mail gig, which runs at the foot of Ben Glamaig, on a road well sheltered from the worst fury of the blast, has sometimes to stand to face the wind for minutes together, knowing that it would certainly be upset if the squalls caught it broadside. Not

very long ago a great schooner was capsized and foundered at anchor here by a sudden gust, just because she happened to have one or two empty herring barrels piled upon her deck. Next to Loch Scavaig for fury of sudden squalls comes Loch Sligachan. In the latter you have only the breath of Glamaig, but at Scavaig you must prepare for the combined blasts of all the Cuchullins—all the giants gathering together in the mist, and manifesting a fury to which Polypheme's passion against Ulysses was a trifle.

But it was summer time, and we anticipated nothing terrific, otherwise we should certainly not have ventured yonder in so frail and tiny a thing as the *Tern*. We had already falsified all the dire predictions which had greeted us on setting forth and followed us throughout our journey—we had crossed and recrossed the Minch, penetrated into the wild fjörds of the Long Island, beaten round the north-east coast of Skye in the open sea—all in a poor little crank craft not seven tons burden, seven feet beam, rigged for racing, and intended only for river sailing in very mild weather. Our good fortune,

instead of turning our brains, had made us more cautious than when we set forth. Many perils escaped had explained to us the real danger of our attempt. We had certainly no anticipation of meeting in the narrows the fate which we had escaped so often in the open sea.

What with the slight wind, and the weary beating down the Sound, we did not sight Sconser Lodge, which lies just at the mouth of Loch Sligachan, until the sunset. By this time the clouds had somewhat cleared away about Glamaig, and glorious shafts of luminous silver were working wondrous chemistry among the dark mists. We put about close to Raasay House, a fine dwelling in the midst of well-cultivated land, and feasted our eyes with the fantastic forms and colours of the Skye cliffs to the westward, grouped together in the strange wild illumination of a cloudy sunset: domes, pinnacles, spires, rising with dark outline against the west, and flitting from shade to light, from light to shade, as the mist cleared away or darkened against the sinking sun; with vivid patches between of dark brown rocks and of green grass washed to glistening emerald

by recent rain. It was a scene of strange beauty— Nature mimicking with unnatural perfection the mighty works of men, colouring all with the wildest hues of the imagination, and revealing beyond, at intervals, glimpses of other domes, pinnacles, and spires, flaming dusky in the sunset, and crumbling down, like the ruins of a burning city, one by one. What came into the mind just then was not Wordsworth's sonnet on a similar cloudy pageant, but those wonderful stanzas of a wonderful poem by the same great poet on the eclipse of the sun in 1820:—

“Awe-stricken she beholds the array
That guards the temple night and day;
Angels she sees, that might from heaven have flown,
And virgin saints, who not in vain
Have striven by purity to gain
The beatific crown—

“Sees long-drawn files, concentric rings,
Each narrowing above each; the wings,
The uplifted palms, the silent marble lips,
The starry zone of sovereign height—
All steeped in the portentous light!
All suffering dim eclipse!”

It is difficult to tell why these lines should have arisen in our mind at that moment;—for no stronger

reason, perhaps, than that which caused the figures themselves to rise before Wordsworth by the side of Lugano. He had once seen the Cathedral at Milan, and when the eclipse came, he could not help following it thither in imagination. These faint associations are the strangest things in life, and the sweetest things in song. Portentous light! dim eclipse! These were the only words truly applicable to the scene we were gazing upon at that moment; and those few words were the chain of the association—the magical charm linking sense and soul—bringing Milan to Skye, filling the sunset picture with the wings, uplifted palms, and silent lips of angels and virgin saints—

“ All steeped in the portentous light!
All suffering dim eclipse!”

It was just as we were contemplating this wonder, that the water blackened to windward, and we were laid over with the first squall from Glamaig. What a screaming in the rigging! what a rattling of dishes and buckets in the forecastle! What a clutching at spars and ropes on deck! It was gone in a

moment, and the *Tern* dashed buoyantly forward. The wind had freshened suddenly, and we were bowling along at five or six miles an hour, carrying trysail, foresail, and the second jib. We were still a good two miles from Sconser Lodge, so that the squalls, when they reached us, had lost much of their force. Squall second was even softer than the first; we laughed as it whizzed through the rigging, just putting the bulwarks under, and we were still further encouraged by a sudden brightening of the Ben. Fools! that brightening should not have beguiled us. Hamish, who was at the helm, had just made the remark that he thought "the nicht would be a good nicht," and we were about half a mile off the mouth of Loch Sligachan, when *squall third*, coming sheer down the sides of Glamaig, smote us like a thunderbolt, and with a terrific shriek laid the *Tern* clean upon her broadside. It was a trying moment;—the trysail trailed in the water, and the water, covering all the decks to leeward, poured in a light green stream into the cockpit, and even through the hatches into the cabin. The Cook screamed from below amid an awful

clatter of rubbish, and those on deck shivered and looked pale. "Off wi' the foresail!" screamed Hamish; and it was done in an instant. For a moment it seemed as if the little craft would never right, but slowly she emerged from her bath and was shaken up in the wind, shivering like a half-drowned bird. All breathed hard after the escape. After such a warning it was considered advisable to exchange the big jib for the little storm one—which was done, and eased the boat very considerably.

Well, it is useless to go on with further details of our entry into Sligachan. So determined did the wind seem to oppose our passage and give us a ducking, that once or twice we actually thought of turning tail and running back to Portree. But we persevered, even without a local pilot, and the tide being nearly full, we passed over sunken dangers with comparative safety. At the narrowest part of the passage we could see the bottom, and actually grazed it with our keel. But the winds were the worst. The anchorage was right at the foot of Glamaig, so that the nearer we drew the fiercer and more sudden were the squalls. The people gathered

on shore, evidently expecting to see us get into trouble. To their astonishment, however, we shook the little *Tern* through every blast, righted and saved her at each moment of peril, and finally dropped anchor safely before it was quite dark. How we should have fared on a really stormy day it is not difficult to guess. This was an ordinary evening, somewhat windy, but what the men of Sligachan called "good weather." So terrific, however, is the suction of the hills beyond, and so sheer the descent of Glamaig to the water, that winds which are mild elsewhere become furious here. Keep us from Sligachan after October, when the south-wester begins to come with its mighty rain-clouds over the sea!

While we are on the subject of squalls, we may complete our report against Ben Glamaig by stating that on one occasion, during our stay in the loch, although we were only about two hundred yards from low-water mark, we could hold no communication with the shore for a night and a day, and were all that time watching anxiously lest the *Tern's* heavy mast should founder her at anchor. "Half a

gale" of wind was blowing; and with many of the squalls, the boat, though perfectly bare of canvas, lay over so much as to ship water into the cockpit. The wind came straight off Glamaig, and though there was no "fetch" whatever, there was scarcely a dark spot between us and the shore—all was churned as white as snow.

That night, shut up on board his little vessel, the Wanderer read again King Haco's Saga, and put it into new language for the English public. All through the voyage he had been thinking of Haco and his chiefs; and how they had haunted that coast in their strange ships, leaving everywhere the traditions of their race. Skye still rings with them. Portree is still "the King's Harbour;" "Kyleakin" remains the "Passage of King Hakon." How they fared among the perilous waters, is a tale worth telling, and most fittingly in the narrow inland sounds of Skye, where Haco the King and his invading fleet will never be forgotten.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SAGA OF HACO THE KING.*

I.

KING ALEXANDER'S DREAM AND DEATH.

WHEN Haco the King ruled over Norway, King Alexander, son of William, sent from Scotland in the Western Sea two bishops to King Haco, begging him to give up those lands in the Hebrides which King Magnus Barefoot had unjustly taken from King Malcolm. King Haco answered, that Magnus had settled with Malcolm what districts the Norwegians should have in Scotland, or in the islands which lie near it, adding, moreover, that the King of Scot-

* Wherever, in the following translation, I have used a modern Scotch word, such as "speired" (inquired), "harried" (plundered), "kirk" (church), "bairns" (children), it is to be understood that the modern word is the same in form, sound, and meaning as the original Icelandic.—R. B.

land had no rule in the Hebrides at the time when King Magnus won them from King Godfred, and also that King Magnus had only taken back his birthright. Then quoth the bishops, "Our master, the King of Scotland, would willingly purchase all the Hebrides, and we therefore entreat King Haco to value them in fine silver." But Haco laughed, saying he had no such lack of pence as to be compelled to sell his inheritance. With these words for an answer the bishops went their way.

Now from this cause there speedily arose great coldness between the kings; yet, again and again, Alexander the King sent fresh messengers with new offers. But when he could not purchase those lands of King Haco, he took other measures in hand which were not princely. Collecting a host throughout all Scotland, he prepared for a voyage to the Hebrides, and vowed to win those islands under his dominion, vowing clear and loud before his subjects that he would not rest till he had set his flag on the cliffs of Thurso, and had gained all the provinces which the Norwegian monarch possessed west of the German Ocean.

In these days King Alexander sent word to John, Lord of the Isles, that he wished to speak with him. But King John would not meet the Scottish king till some earls of Scotland had pledged their honour that he should fare safely. When the King met the Scottish monarch he bade King John that he would give up Kiamaburgh into his power, and three other castles which he held of King Haco, as also the other lands which King Haco had given him. But John did well and uprightly, and said that he would not break his troth to King Haco. On this he went away, and stopped not at any place till he came quite north to the Lewis.

That summer, Alexander, King of Scotland, then lying in Kiararey Sound, dreamed a dream. He thought that three men came to him: one of them was in royal robes, but very stern, ruddy in countenance, short and thick; another was of slender make, but active, and of all men most majestic; the third, again, was of a very great stature, but his features were wild and distorted, and he was unsightly to look upon. Now, these three spoke to Alexander in his dream, and speired whether he

meant to harry the isles of the Western Sea. Alexander answered that he certainly meant to win back the isles under his crown. Then those three spirits bade him go back, and told him no other course would turn out to his good: The king told his dream, and many bade him to return. But the king would not, and a little after he fell sick and died. The Scottish army then broke up; and they bare the king's body to Scotland.

Now all men say that the three men whom the king saw in his sleep were—St. Olaf, King of Norway; St. Magnus, Earl of Orkney; and Columba, the Saint of Icolmkill.

II.

KING HACO GATHERS HIS HOST.

Then the Scottish people took for their king Alexander, the son of Alexander, who married the daughter of Henry, King of England, and became a meikle prince.

In the summer of 1262 there came to Haco,

King of Norway, many letters from the kings of the Hebrides in the Western Seas, complaining sore of the ill-deeds of the Earl of Ross, Kiarnach, son of MacCamal, and other Scots. These same burned villages and kirks, and killed great numbers both of men and women. They had even taken the small bairns, and, raising them on the points of their spears, shook them till they slipped down to their hands, when they threw them away dead on the ground. The letters said, also, that the Scottish king would win all the Hebrides if life was granted him.

When King Haco heard these tidings they gave him much uneasiness, and he laid the case before his council. Then it was settled that King Haco should, in the winter season about Yule, issue an edict through all Norway, and order out both troops and food for an expedition. He bade all his forces meet him at Bergen early in spring.

King Haco came to Bergen on Christmas, he dwelt there during the spring, and made ready swiftly for war. After that a great number of barons and officers, and vassals, and a vast many soldiers came in daily unto him.

King Haco held a general council near Bergen, at Backa. There the meikle host came together. The king then cried that this host was to be sent against Scotland, in the Western Seas.

During this voyage King Haco had that great vessel which he had bade them build at Bergen. It was built all of oak, and had twenty banks of oars. It was decked with heads and necks of dragons beautifully overlaid with gold. He had also many other well-found ships.

In the spring, King Haco sent John Langlifeson and Henry Scot west to the Orkneys, to get pilots for Scotland. From thence John sailed to the Hebrides, and told King Dugal that he might expect an army from the East. Word had got abroad that the Scots would harry in the islands that summer. King Dugal therefore spread a report that forty ships were coming from Norway. Some time before the King himself was ready he sent eight ships to the westward. The captains of these were Ronald Urka, Erling Ivarson, Andrew Nicholson, and Halvard Red.

When the King had built his ship, he went with

all his host from the capital to Eidvags; afterwards he himself hied back to the city, and dwelt there some nights, and then set out for Herlover. Here came together all the troops, both from the north and the south.

King Haco lay with all his force at Herlover; it was a mighty and glorious host.

Three nights before the Selian vigils King Haco set sail for the German Sea with all his fleet. He had now been King of Norway six and forty winters. He had a good breeze, the weather was fair, and the fleet beautiful to behold sailing southward to the islands of the Western Sea.

III.

SAILING OF THE GREAT FLEET.

King Haco had a company chosen well for his own ship. There were, on the quarter-deck, Thorlife, Abbot of Holm, Sir Askatin, four priests, chaplains to the king, Andrew of Thissisey, Aslac Guss, the king's master of the horse, Andrew Hawardson, Guthorm Gillason and Thorstein his

brother, Eirek Scot Gautson, with many others. There were on the main-deck: Aslack Dagson, Steinar Herka, Klomit Langi, Andrew Gums, Eirek Dugalson, the father of King Dugal, Einar Lang-Bard, Arnbjorn Suela, Sigvat Bodvarson, Hoskuld Oddson, John Hoglif, Arni Stinkar. On the fore-deck there were: Sigurd the son of Ivar Rofu, Ivar Helgason of Lofloc, Erlend Scolbein, Dag of Southeim, Briniolf Johnson, Gudleik Sneis, and most of the king's chamberlains, with Andrew Plytt, the king's treasurer. There were in the fore-castle: Eirek Skifa, Thornfin Sigvald, Kari Endridson, Gudbrand Johnson, and many of the cup-bearers. There were four men on every half rower's seat. With King Haco, Magnus, Earl of Orkney, left Bergen, and the king gave him a good galley. These barons were also with the king: Briniolf Johnson, Fin Gautson, Erling Alfson, Erlend Red, Bard of Hestby, Eilif of Naustadale, Andrew Pott, and Ogmund Krekedants. Erling Ivarson, John Drotning, Gaut of Meli, and Nicholas of Giska, were behind with Prince Magnus at Bergen, as were several other officers who had not been ready.

King Haco having got a gentle breeze was two nights at sea, when he reached that harbour of Shetland called Breydeyar Sound, and from thence he sailed to Ronaldsvo with all his host.

While King Haco lay in Ronaldsvo, a great darkness drew over the sun, so that only a little ring was bright around; and it continued so for some hours.

IV.

KING HACO'S SAILING SOUTHWARD.

On the day of St. Laurence's wake King Haco, after a cruise in the Orkneys, sailed with all his forces to a haven that is called Hasleviarvic, from that to Lewis, so on to Raasa, and from thence to that place in Skye Sound which is called Calliach Stone. Here he was joined by Magnus King of Man, and by Erling Ivarson, Andrew Nicholson, and Halward. He next sailed south to the Sound of Mull, and then to Kiararey, where King Dugal and the other Hebrideans were assembled with their men.

King Haco had now more than one hundred vessels, for the most part large, and all of them well prepared both with men and weapons. While he abode at Kiararey he sent fifty ships south to the Mull of Kintire to harry. The captains of the same were King Dugal, Magnus King of Man, Bruniolf Johnson, Ronald Urka, Andrew Pott, Ogmund Krekedants, Vagleic Priestson. He sent, also, five ships for Bute under Erling Red, Andrew Nicholson, Simon Stutt, Ivar Ungi Eyfari, and Gutthorm the Hebridean.

Then did Haco the King sail south to Gudey before Kintire, where he anchored. There he met John, King of the Isles, whom King Haco in vain besought to follow him. But King John said he was pledged to the Scottish king, of whom he held more lands than of King Haco. He, therefore, entreated King Haco to dispose of all those estates which he had conferred upon him. King Haco kept him with him some time, vainly trying to win him back to his allegiance.

During King Haco's stay at Gudey, an abbot of Greymonks came to him, bidding him spare their cloister and Holy Kirk. The king granted

them this, and gave them his own promise in writing.

Friar Simon had long lain sick and he died at Gudey. His corpse was carried to Kintire and buried in the Greymonks cloister. They spread a fringed pall over his grave and called him Saint.

In those days came men from King Dugal, and said, that the lords of Kintire and others would surrender their lands to King Haco, and follow with their clansmen under his banner. Then the King said that he would not harry their lands if they yielded the next day; ere noon they took an oath to King Haco and gave hostages. The King laid a fine of a thousand head of cattle on their estates. Thereupon Angus yielded up Isla also to the King, and the King granted it back unto him as liegeman to Norway.

Soon after this the King sailed south along Kintire with all his fleet, and anchored in Arran Sound. Thither often came barefooted friars from the King of Scotland to King Haco seeking peace. Here King Haco freed his prisoner, King John, gave him many rich gifts, and bade him go in peace. Then did

he swear to King Haco to labour at all times to make peace between him and the King of Scots. Thereafter King Haco sent Gilbert, Bishop of Hammer, Henry, Bishop of Orkney, Andrew Nicholson, Andrew Plytt, and Paul Soor to King Alexander, who met them honourably, and sent envoys to King Haco in his turn. Now King Haco had writ down all the names of the Western Islands which he called his own, and King Alexander had named all those which he would not yield. These last were Bute, Arran, and the two Cumbras. But the Scots wilfully held aloof from a settlement, because summer was ending and the foul weather was beginning. Seeing this, Haco the King sailed in under the Cumbras with all his host.

Thereafter King Haco sent as envoys a bishop and a baron, and to meet them came some knights and cloistermen. They spoke much but could not agree, and late in the day so many Scots gathered together that the Norwegians feared treachery and drew away to their ships. Many now bade the King end the truce and harry, as food was scant. But Haco sent one Kolbein Rich to the

King of Scots with peace letters, offering that the kings should meet, with all their host, and speak of peace. If peace, by God's grace, took place, it would be well; but if not, then should the kings fight with their whole host, and let him win whom God pleased. The King of Scots was not loath to fight, but said little in answer. Kolbein went back to his master, and thereupon the truce was over.

V.

THE KING'S FLEET MEETS WITH A GREAT STORM.

The King now sent sixty ships into Skipa-Fjörd.* Their commanders were Magnus, King of Man, King Dugal, and Allan his brother, Angus, Margad, Vigleik Prieston, and Ivar Holm. When they came to the head of the Fjörd, they took their boats and drew them over the land to a great water which is called Loch Lomond. On the far side thereof was a rich earldom called Lennox, and in the centre were many islands, well peopled, which the North-

* Loch Long.

men wasted with fire, destroying also all the buildings on the water side.

Allan, brother of King Dugal, marched far into the land, slew many men and took many hundred head of cattle. Thereafter the Northmen went back to their ships. They met with so great a storm that ten of their ships were wrecked in the Fjörd. It was now that Ivar Holm took that sickness of which he died.

King Haco still lay in the open. Michaelmas happened on a Saturday, and on Monday night after there came a great tempest with hailstones and rain. The watch on the forecastle of the King's ship called out that a transport vessel was driving against their cable. The men leapt up on deck, but the rigging of the transport caught the prow of the King's ship and carried away its figure-head. The vessel then fell so foul aboard that its anchor grappled the ropes of the King's ship, which straight began to drag its anchor. Whereupon the King bade them cut the transport's cable, which being done, she drove out to sea. The King's ship now rode safe till daylight. In the morning, at flood tide, the transport was cast

ashore, together with a galley. The wind still rose, the King's men got more ropes and cast out a fifth anchor. The King himself rowed ashore in his boat to the isles and ordered mass to be sung. Meantime, the ships dragged up the Sound, and the storm was so fierce that some cut away their masts and others drove ashore. The King's ship still drove, though seven anchors had been cast out. They threw out an eighth, which was the sheet anchor. The ship still drove, but at last the anchors held fast. Five ships went ashore. So great was the storm that men said magic had done it, and the fall of rain was dreadful.

Now when the Scots saw that the vessels had driven ashore, they gathered together and approached the Northmen, and threw at them. But the Northmen fought well and fiercely, sheltered by their ships; the Scots made several attacks at intervals, killing few men, but wounding many. Then King Haco sent boats with men to help them.

Lastly, the King, with Thorlaug Bosa, set sail for the shore in a barge. At his coming the Scots fled, and the Northmen passed the night ashore. But in

the night the Scots entered the wrecked transport and bare off what they could. The morning after the King landed with many armed folk; he ordered the vessel to be lightened and towed out to the fleet.

VI.

THE BATTLE OF LARGS.

A little after that they saw the Scots, and they thought the King of Scotland was there himself, because the host was so great. Ogmund Krekedants stood on a height, and his men with him. The Scots attacked him with their van, and approached him in so great force that the Northmen begged the King to row out to his ships and to send them help. The King would stay on land, but they would not let him bide in such danger, and he rowed out in his boat to his fleet in the open Sound. These barons abode ashore: Andrew Nicholson, Ogmund Krekedants, Erling Alfson, Andrew Pott, Ronald Urka, Thorlaug Bosi, and Paul Soor. All the fighting men with them on land were eight hundred or more. Of those,

two hundred were on the height with Ogmund, but the rest were gathered together on the beach. Then the Scots drew nigh, numbering near fifteen hundred knights; their horses had all breast-plates, and many Spanish steeds were clad in mail. The Scots had also many soldiers on foot well weaponed, most of them with bows and spears.

Now the Northmen on the height drew back slowly towards the sea, thinking that the Scots might surround them. Andrew Nicholson then came up to the height, and bade Ogmund to back slowly to the beach, and not fly like routed men. The Scots thereupon attacked them fiercely with darts and stones. Many were the weapons showered on the Northmen, who defended themselves stoutly as they went. But when they came to the sea, all rushing swifter than they should, their fellows on the beach fancied they were routed. Wherefore some leaped into their boats, and rowed in them from shore, and others leaped into the transport. The soldiers called out to them to stay, and some few men returned. Andrew Pott leaped over two boats and into a third, and so from land. Many

boats sunk down, and some men were drowned. After that the Northmen on shore turned about towards the water.

Here fell Haco of Steine, attendant of Haco the King. Then were the Norwegians driven south from the transport, and these were their leaders: Andrew Nicholson, Ogmund Krekedants, Thorlaug Bosi, and Paul Soor. Hard blows were dealt, and the foemen were ill-matched, for ten Scots fought against each Northman.

There was a young knight of the Scots, named Ferash, and rich both in birth and gear. He had a helmet all gold, and set with precious stones, and his armour was also gold. He rode up to the Northmen, but none followed. He rode up to the Northmen, and then back to his own host. Then Andrew Nicholson came close to the ranks of the Scots. He met that brave knight and struck at him so fiercely, that he cut through the armour into his thigh, and reached even to the saddle. The Northman took off his costly belt. Then began hard blows. Many fell on both sides, but most of the Scots, as Sturlas sings:—

“Gathered in circle,
With clangour of armour,
Our youth struck the mighty
Donners of armlets:
Limbs dead and bloody
Glutted the death-birds.
Who shall avenge now
The mighty belt-wearer?”

While this fight was raging, there was so great a storm, that King Haco saw no hope of landing his host. Yet Ronald and Eilif of Naustadale rowed ashore with men and fought fiercely, together with those Northmen who had fled in their boats. Ronald was driven back to his ships, but Eilif stood firm. The Northmen now ranged themselves anew; and the Scots took the height. There were constant fights with stones and darts; but towards the end of day the Northmen rushed up against the Scots on the hill. The Scots then fled from the height, and betook themselves to their mountains. The Northmen then entered their boats, and rowed out to the fleet, and came safely through the storm. At morning they returned to land to look after those who had fallen. Among the dead were Haco of Steine and Thorgisl Gloppa, the King's housemen.

There fell also a good bondsman from Drontheim, called Karlhoved, and another from Fiorde, called Halkel. Besides these there perished three Light-Swains,* Thorstein Bat, John Ballhoved, and Halward Buniard. The Northmen could not tell how many of the Scots fell, for their dead bodies were taken up and carried to the woods. Haco ordered his dead men to be carried to Holy Church.

VII.

KING HACO SAILS NORTHWARD.

The fifth day after that the King took up his anchor, and guided his ship close under the Cumbras. That day came unto him the ships which had sailed up Skipa-Fjörd. The fast-day after it was good weather, and the King sent his vessels ashore, to burn the ships which had been wrecked; and that same day, a little after, the King sailed past Cumbra out to Melansey, and lay there several nights. Here came unto him the messengers he had sent to Ireland, and told him

* *Kerti-sveinar*, Masters of the Lights.

that the Irish Northmen would support his host till he freed them from the rule of the English king. Haco longed much to sail to Ireland; but the wind was not fair. He took counsel, and the whole host wished him not to sail. He said to them that he would depart for the Hebrides, for the host was short of food. Then did Haco the King order the corse of Ivar Holm to be carried into Bute, and there it was buried.

After that the King sailed under Melansey, and lay some nights under Arran, and then to Sandey, and so to the Mull of Kintire, and came close under Gudey. Then sailed he out to Ila Sound, and lay there two nights. He laid levy on the island in three hundred head of cattle; but some was paid in meal and cheese. Then Haco the King sailed the first Sunday in winter, and met so much storm, with wrack, that scarce a ship bore its sails. Then the King took haven in Keararey, and there messengers went between him and King John, but to little end. At this time the King was told that his men had harried much in Mull, and slain some men of Mull, and that two or three Northmen had fallen.

Next, King Haco sailed to the Calf of Mull, and lay there some nights. There he was left by King Dugald and Allan his brother; and the King gave them those estates which King John had owned. Magnus, King of Man, and other islesmen, had departed before. To Rudri he gave Bute, and Arran to Margad. To Dugal he gave the castle in Kintire, which Guthorm Backa-Rolf had taken in the summer. In this manner had Haco the King gained back all those lands which King Magnus Barefoot had wrested from the Scots and the islesmen.

Haco the King sailed from the Calf of Mull to Rauney, and from Rauney northwards. The wind blowing against him, he sailed into Wester-Fjörd, in Skye, and levied food of islesmen. He next sailed past Cape Wrath, and at Dyrness the weather fell calm, and the King let the ships be steered into Gia-Fjörd. This was the Feast of the two Apostles, Simon and Jude, and the mass day was a Sunday. The King lay there for the night. On the mass day, after mass was sung, there came to him some Scots, whom the Northman had taken. The King gave them liberty and sent them up the country, and made

them promise to come back with cattle; but one was left behind in hostage. That same day nine men of Andrew Biusa's ship went ashore for water, and a little while after a cry was heard from the land. The crew rowed to shore from the fleet, and saw two men swimming, wounded sore, and took them aboard; but seven were slain on land, without arms, while their boat was aground. The Scots then fled to a wood, while the Northmen lifted their dead. On the Monday, King Haco sailed from Gia-Fjörd, and gave liberty to the Scottish hostage and set him ashore. That night the King came to Orkney, and lay in a sound north from Asmundsvo; thence he sailed for Ronaldsvo and most of his fleet with him. As they sailed over Pentland-Fjörd there rose a great whirlpool, into which fell a ship of Rygia-fylke, and all men there were drowned. John of Hestby drove through the straits, and came near being wrecked in the Gulf; but with God's grace the ship was forced east to the open sea, and he hied to Norway.

While King Haco lay in Orkney most of his ships sailed to Norway, some with the King's leave,

but many gave themselves leave. The King had said at first when he came to the islands, that he would steer straight home; but the wind was in his teeth, and he thought to bide in the Orkneys during the winter. He named twenty ships to stay, and gave the rest leave to go. All his vassals remained, save Eilif of Naustdale, who sailed eastward home; but many of the best men in the land abode with the King. Then the King sent letters to Norway, concerning the things he should need. After All Saints' mass the King sailed his ships to Medalland Harbour, but he spent one day at Ronaldsha..

VIII.

KING HACO'S SICKNESS.

The Saturday ere Martinmas, King Haco rode out to Medallands Harbour, and after mass he fell very sick. At night he was aboard his ship, but at morning he let mass be sung on land. Afterwards he held a council where the ship should lie, and bade

his men look well after their vessels. After that each skipper took charge of his own ship. Some were laid up in Medallands Haven, and some in at Skalpeid.

Next, King Haco went to Skalpeid and rode to Kirkwall; and there abode in the bishop's palace with such men as dined at his board. Here the King and the bishop kept each his board in the hall for his own men, but the King dined in the room above. Andrew Plytt looked after the King's table, and gave to each of the followers his share. After all that was arranged, the divers skippers went where their ships were laid up. The barons in Kirkwall were Briniolf Johnson, Erling Alfson, Ronald Urka, Erlng of Birkey, John Drotning, and Erlend Red. The other barons were in their districts.

King Haco had all the summer worked much and anxiously, and had slept little, and when he came to Kirkwall he lay sick in bed. When he had lain some nights the sickness lessened, and he was on foot three days. The first day he walked in his rooms, the second he heard mass in the Bishop's

Chapel, and the third day he went to Magnus Kirk and around the shrine of the holy Earl Magnus. He then ordered a bath and was shaven. Then some nights after he sickened again and lay again in bed. In his sickness he had read to him the Bible and Latin books. But finding he grew sad in thinking on these things, he had read to him night and day books of the north—first the lives of holy men, and when these were ended, the tales of our kings from Haldan the Swart, and so of all the Northern kings, each after each. Haco the King found his sickness still increase. He thought, therefore, of the pay due to his troops, and ordered a mark of fine silver to each court-man, and half a mark to each of the light-swains and other followers. He let all the silver plate of his board be weighed, and ordered it to be given forth if the realm-silver was too little. King Haco was shriven the night before St. Lucia's mass. There were there Thorgisl, Bishop of Stavanger, Gilbert, Bishop of Hamar, Henry, Bishop of Orkney, Abbot Thorleif, and many other learned men, and before he was smeared all said farewell to the King and kissed him. He still spake clear, and

his favourites asked him if he had any other son besides Prince Magnus, or any other heirs who might share in the state. But he vowed that he had no other son and no daughter but what all men knew.

Then were read the Sagas of the kings down to Suerer, and he ordered them to read the life of Suerer, and to read it night and day as often as he was awake.

IX.

KING HACO'S DEATH AND BURIAL.

The mass day of St. Lucia was a Thursday, and on the Saturday after the King's sickness grew so great that he lost speech, and at midnight Almighty God called King Haco out of this home's life. These barons beheld his death, Briniolf Johnson, Erling Alfson, John Drotning, Ronald Urka, and some serving men who had been near the King in his sickness. Directly after he died, bishops and learned men were sent for and mass was sung. Then all the folk went forth save Thorgisl the Bishop, Briniolf Johnson, and two other men

who watched the body and did all the service due to so mighty a lord and prince as was Haco the King. On Saturday the corse was carried into the high chamber and set on a bier. The body was clad in rich raiment and a garland set on his head; and all bedight as became a crowned monarch. The light-swains stood with tapers and the whole hall was lit. Then went all folk to see the body, and it was fair and blooming, and the face was fair in hue as in living men. There was great solace of the grief of all there to see their departed King so richly dight. Then was sung the high mass for the dead. The nobles kept wake by the corse through the night. On Monday the body was borne to Magnus Kirk, and royally laid out that night. On Tuesday it was laid in a kist and buried in the choir of St. Magnus Kirk, near the steps of the shrine of St. Magnus the Earl. Afterwards the tomb was closed and a pall spread over. Then was it settled that wake should be kept all winter over the grave. At Yule the bishop and Andrew Plytt made feasts, as the king had ordered before he went, and good gifts were given to all the host.

Now King Haco had given orders that his corse should be carried east to Norway, and he would be graved near his father and other kinsmen, and about the end of winter was launched that meikle ship which Haco the King had in the west. On Ash-Wednesday the corse of the King was taken out of the earth; this was on the third of the nones of March. The courtmen then went with the corse to Skalpeid to the ship. The chief leaders of the ship were Thorgisl the bishop, and Andrew Plytt. They sailed the first Saturday in Lent, and met hard weather and anchored south in Silavog. Thence they sent letters to Prince Magnus and told him the tidings. Afterwards they sailed north to Bergen. They came to Silavog before the mass of St. Benedict. On mass day Prince Magnus met the corse. The ship was brought near the King's palace and the corse was placed in the summer-hall. The morning after it was borne out to Christ Kirk. There went with it Magnus the King, the two queens, and courtmen and town folk. After that the body was buried in the choir of Christ Kirk, and Magnus the King spake to the folk with many good words;

there stood all the folk in great grief, as Sturlas sings :

“Three nights came the mighty
Warriors to Bergen,
Ere in the earth-vale
Lay the wise ruler.
The pale weapon-breakers
Stood gathered around him,
Full weeping and joyless
(Meikle strife followed).”

Haco the King was buried three nights before the mass of Mary; this was after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ one thousand two hundred and sixty-three years.

CHAPTER VII.

GLEN SLIGACHAN AND THE CUCHULLINS.

Sconser and Sligachan—Party and Guide—Dawn on the Cuchullins—Scur-na-Gillean—A Rhapsody on Geology—Fire and Ice—The Path along the Glen—Hart-o'-Corry—Ben Blaven—A Monologue on Ossian—Schneider and the Red Deer—First Glimpse of the "Corry of the Water"—Lochan Dhu.

THE Cuchullin Hills are the Temple of Ossian, and the temple has two porches—Sligachan and Scavaig. Having now fairly halted on the threshold of one, we stood close to an enchanted world. Opposite our anchorage was the village of Sconser—a number of rude hovels scattered on the hillside, with many fine patches of green corn and potatoes, and bits of excellent pasture for the cows. A smack was at anchor close to us, skiffs were drawn up above high-water mark, and nets were drying everywhere on the beach; and we soon ascertained that the herring

were "up the loch." Right above us, as we have said, rose Ben Glamaig, towering to a desolate and barren cone, seamed everywhere with the beds of streams, and covered with the gray sand and loose rocks deposited in seasons of flood. At times this red mountain is a worthy neighbour of the Cuchullins, but at others, notably when the sun is very bright and the air very clear, it appears sufficiently commonplace. Commonplace is an adjective at no time applicable to Scur-na-Gillean or Blaven; these are magnificent in all weathers, no sunlight being able to rob them of the wildly beautiful outlines and lurid tints of the hypersthene.

Situated at the head of the loch is Sligachan Inn, the cleanest, snuggest, cheapest little place of the sort in all the Highlands of Scotland. Here, on the morning after our arrival, we procured ponies and a guide, and proceeded in ordinary tourist-fashion to make our way to the heart of the temple—to the melancholy lake of Corruisk, distant about nine miles from the head of Sligachan. Our party numbered five, including the guide. Two were mounted, while the Wanderer and Hamish Shaw

trudged on foot. The guide (a gloomy Gael of thirteen, as sturdy as a whin-bush, and about as communicative) led the way, uttering ever and anon an eldritch whistle much like the doleful scream of the curlew. Our way lay up Glen Sligachan, along a footway discernible only by the experienced eye; and we had scarcely proceeded a quarter of a mile from the inn, when the Cuchullins, in all their grandeur and desolation, began to gather upon us—

“ Taciti, soli, e senza compagna,”*

their wild outlines showing in strange contrast to the conical Red Hills, so called from the ruddy hues of the syenite and porphyry of which they are composed. Chief of the Red Hills is Glamaig; king of the Cuchullins is Blaabhein, or Blaven. Down the round sides of Glamaig rolls the red *débris* of gravel and sand, washed into dark lines by innumerable watercourses, and giving to the lonely hill the aspect of a huge cone slowly mouldering, rusting, and decomposing, save where the deep heather gathers on its hollow flanks below. But Blaven, like all his

* ‘Inferno,’ cant. xxiii.

brethren, preserves the one dark hue of hypersthene, while his sides are torn into craggy gulfs and lurid caves, and his hooked forehead cuts in sharp silhouette the gray and silent sky. The mountainous part of Skye consists of these two groups, so strangely contrasted in shape and colour, so totally unlike in geological composition.* The range of the Cuchullins is almost completely detached from that of the Red Hills by the valley of Glen Sligachan.

Our start was made soon after dawn, and as we entered the great glen the mists of morning still brooded like white smoke over the hills on either side, while far away eastward the clouds parted above the mountain-tops, and revealed a glimpse of heaven, green as the delicate outer leaves of the water-lily. The rain had fallen heavily during the night, and the dead stillness of the air was broken only by the low murmur of streams and newborn runlets. Passing by a glassy pool of Sligachan Burn, we saw a young salmon leap glittering like gold two feet into the air, giving us therewith

* See the admirable treatise on the 'Geology of the Cuchullin Hills,' by Professor Forbes, of St. Andrews.

his prophecy of a still and windless day; and while Schneider the wayward, warm already in anticipation, plunged in for her morning bath, up rose the old cock-grouse from the margin of the pool, and fled, screaming his warning to the six or eight little "cheepers" which were following the old hen swiftly and furtively through the deep heather. The sun broke out on the burn, and it was full day. The damp rocks gleamed like silver, the heather glittered with innumerable gems. Not a member of the party but caught the glad contagion. The ponies pricked up their ears, and carried their riders more swiftly along the devious track. Schneider went raving mad with delight, and rushed around the party in dripping circles. The Wanderer leapt like a very hart for joy. Hamish Shaw murmured a Gaelic ditty of love and gladness; and the boy-guide answered with a blither scream.

To the Wanderer, however, the path was familiar as to the guide, for he had trod it many a time, both alone and in the best of company; and, indeed, his present rapture was far more allied to physical delight in the glorious dawn than to thorough per-

ception of the beautiful scene opening up around him. Such scenery—the scenery whose appeal is to the soul—does not startle suddenly; its supreme effect is subtle and slow; the first emotion in perceiving it sometimes even is like disappointment. The Wanderer's mind, too, is like a well, profound, of course, but fed mysteriously; slow, very slow, to gather in thoughts from the numberless veins and pores of communication. He drank the dawn like an animal—like a ruminant cow, like a mountain-goat. He had scarcely a thought for the marvellous landscape. There was no more speculation in his eyes than in those of his guide. Meantime, his heart could only dance, his brain only spin, his eyes only gleam. He saw everything, but lightly, dazzlingly through the gleam of the senses. The first sip of the mystic cup merely produced intoxication.

Then, slowly, minute by minute, the wild animal instinct cleared off, and the gray light of spiritual perception settled into the eyes. By this time, the mists on either side the glen had changed into mere solitary vapours, dying a lingering death each in some lonely gorge screened from the sun; and the

mountains shone darkly beautiful after their morning bath of rain. Prominent above all, on the north-east side of the glen, rose the serrated outlines of Scur-na-Gillean, or the Hill of the Young Men, so named after certain shepherds who lost their lives while vainly endeavouring to gain the summit. The height of this mountain, perhaps the highest of the Cuchullins, does not exceed 3200 feet, but the ascent is very perilous. Rent into huge fissures by the throes of earthquake, titanic and livid, from foot to base one stretch of stone, without one blade of grass or green heather, it stretched its weirdly broken outline against a windless and cloudless sky. Few feet have trod its highest cliffs. In 1836, when Professor Forbes first visited the locality, the ascent was deemed impossible. "Talking of it," writes the Professor, "with an active forester in the service of Lord Macdonald, named Duncan Macintyre, whom I engaged to guide me to Corruisk from Sligachan, he told me that he had attempted it repeatedly without success, both by himself, and also with different strangers, who had engaged him for

the purpose; but he indicated a way different from those which he had tried, which he thought might be more successful. I engaged him to accompany me; and the next day (June 7) we succeeded in gaining the top, the extreme roughness of the rocks (all hypersthene) rendering the ascent safe, where, with any other formation, it might have been exceedingly perilous. Indeed, I have never seen a rock so adapted for clambering. At this time I erected a cairn and temporary flag, which stood, I was informed, a whole year; but having no barometer, I could not ascertain the height, which I estimated at 3000 feet. In 1843 I was in Skye with a barometer, but had not an opportunity of revisiting the Cuchullins; but in May, 1845, I ascended the lower summit, nearly adjoining, marked Bruch-na-Fray in the map; and wishing to ascertain the difference of the height of Scur-na-Gillean, I proposed to Macintyre to try to ascend it from the west side. It was no sooner proposed than attempted. It was impossible to do otherwise than descend deep in the rugged ravine of Loat-o'-Corry, which separates the summits, and then face an ascent,

which from a distance appeared almost perpendicular; but, aided by the quality of the rocks already mentioned, we gained the Scur-na-Gillean from the west side, although on reaching the top, and gazing back, it looked like a dizzy precipice." * The barometrical record and geological observations made by the Professor, both here and elsewhere among the Cuchullins, are of the very highest interest. Everywhere among the mountains of Skye are to be traced the proofs of direct glacial action. Many phenomena can be described only as the effects of moving ice; and it would be quite impossible to find these phenomena in greater perfection even among the Alps.

We have no patience with those imaginative people who are so far fascinated by transcendental meteors as to class Geology in the prose sisterhood of Algebra and Mathematics. The typical geologist,

* At the foot of one of these precipices the mangled body of a young tourist was discovered during the autumn of 1870. The dead man was one of two friends who started to make the ascent of Scur-na-Gillean together; but one of whom, being taken slightly unwell on the way, returned to Sligachan Inn, leaving his comrade to proceed to the heights alone, and meet there his terrible doom.

indeed, whom we meet prowling, hammer in hand, in the darkness of Glen Sannox, or rock-tapping on the sea-shore in the society of elderly virgins, or examining Agassiz' atlas through blue spectacles on board the Highland steamboat—this typical being, we repeat, is frequently duller company than the Free Church minister or the dominie; but he is a mere fumbler about the footprints of the fair science, with never the courage to look straight into those beautiful blind eyes of hers, and discover that she has a soul. By what name shall we call her, if not by the divine name of Mnemosyne—the sphinx-like spirit that broods and remembers: a soul, a divinity, brooding blind in the solitude, and feeling with her finger the raised letters of the stone-book which she holds in her lap, and wherein God has written the veritable “Legend of the World?” A prose science?—say rather a sublime Muse! Why, her throne is made of the mountains of the earth, and her speech is the earth-slip and the volcano, and her taper is the lightning, and her forehead touches a coronal of stars. Only the fool misapprehends her and blasphemes. Whoso looks

into her face with reverent eyes is appalled by the light of God there, and sinks to his knees, crying, "I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause, who doeth great things and unsearchable, marvellous things without number."

In sober words, without fine writing or rapture, it must be said that the Cuchullins cannot long be contemplated apart from their geology. Turn your eyes again for a moment on Scur-na-Gillean! Note those sombre hues, those terrific shadows, that jagged outline traced as with a frenzied finger along the sky. It is a gentle autumn morning, and the film of white cloud resting on yonder topmost peak is moveless as the ghost of the moon in an April heaven. There is no sound save the melancholy murmur of water. A strange awe steals over you as you gaze; the soul broods in its own twilight. Then, as the first feeling of almost animal perception fails, the mind awakens from its torpor, and with it comes a sudden illumination. Along those serrated peaks runs a fiery tongue of flame, the abysses blacken, the air is filled with a deep groan, and a thunder-

cloud, driving past in a great wind, clutches at the mountain, and clinging there, belches flame, and beats the darkness into fire with wings of iron. From a rent above, the drifting stars gaze, like affrighted eyes, dim as corpse-lights. In a moment, this wonder passes : the sudden tension of the mind fails, and with it the phantasm, and you are again in the torpid condition, gazing dreamily at the jagged outline of the Titan, dark and silent in the brightness of the autumn morning. Again Mnemosyne waves her hand, and again the mind flashes into picture.

“ O hoary hills, though ye look aged, ye
Are but the children of a latter time !
Methinks I see ye, in that hour sublime
When from the hissing caldron of the sea
Ye were upheaven, while so terribly
The clouds boiled, and the lightning scorched ye bare.
Wild, new-born, blind, Titans in agony,
Ye glared at heaven through folds of fiery hair. . . .
Then, in an instant, while ye trembled thus,
A Hand from heaven, white and luminous,
Pass'd o'er your brows, and hushed your fiery breath.
Lo ! one by one the dim stars gather'd round ;
The great deep glass'd itself, and with no sound
A cold snow glimmering fell ; and all was still as death.”

You have now a glimpse of the ninth circle of the Inferno. Surrounded by the region of the Cold Clime, girt round on every side by unearthly forms of ice and rock, you see below you vales of frozen water, and unfathomable deeps blue as the overhanging heaven. Where fire once raved, snow now broods. Dome, pyramid, and pinnacle tower around with walls and crags of glittering ice. Winds contend silently, and heap the snow with rapid breath. Here and there gleams the vaporous lightning, innocent as the aurora. The glaciers slip, and ever change. And down through the heart of all this desolation, past the very spot where you stand, filling the gigantic hollow of Glen Sligachan, welling onward with one deep murmur, carrying with it mighty rocks and blasted pine-trees, rolls a majestic river, here burnished black as ebony in the rush of its own speed, there foaming over broken boulders and tottering crags, and everywhere gathering into its troubled bosom the drifting glacier and the melting snow.

The Wanderer at least saw all this plain enough as he passed along the weary glen in the rear of his

party ; and the fanciful retrospect, instead of dulling the scene, lends it a solemn consecration. Poor indeed would be the songs of all the Muses, compared with the tale of Mnemosyne, if she could only be brought to utter half she knows.

While the Wanderer was brooding, the riders and their guide were getting well ahead. The ponies were little shaggy rascals, with short stumpy legs twisted like sticks of blackthorn, knees stiff as rusty hinges, and never on any account to be coaxed into a trot, small eyes, where drowsiness and mischief met ; their invariable pace was a walk, slow but steady ; and when left entirely to themselves, they could be relied on to pass safely where the most cautious foot-traveller stumbled. The little phlegmatic fellows seldom erred. They planted their feet alike on the rolling stone and the slippery rock, choosing sometimes the most unlikely passages, and avoiding by instinct the peat bog and the green morass. Only when the unskilled rider, in his human vanity, fancied to improve matters by using the rein and guiding the beast into what looked the right way, did rider and steed seem in danger of getting

into trouble. And what a road that was to travel! More than once on the way did the Wanderer congratulate himself on being afoot. Only a lynx's eye could have made out the pathway along the glen. Everywhere huge boulders were strewn thick as pebbles, intersected constantly by brawling burns, and padded round with knots of ancient heather. To the left the heather and rock clomb over many thymy knolls, until it fringed the base of the Red Hills, which rose above, round, unpicturesque, and discoloured with rain-washed sand. To the right, also, ever stretched heather and rock, until they mingled in imperceptible shadow into the deep-green hypersthene of the Cuchullins. The sun now shone bright, but only deepened the shadows on the neighbouring hills, and still not a sound broke the melancholy silence. "In Glen Sligachan, as in many other parts of Skye," writes Alexander Smith, "the scenery curiously repels you, and drives you in on yourself. You have a quickened sense of your own individuality. The enormous bulks, their gradual receding to invisible crests, their utter movelessness, their austere silence, daunt you. You

are conscious of their presence, and you hardly care to speak, lest you be overheard. You can't laugh; you would not crack a joke for the world. Glen Sligachan would be the place to do a little self-examination in. There you would have a sense of your own meannesses, selfishnesses, paltry evasions of truth and duty, and find out what a shabby fellow you at heart are; and, looking up to your silent father-confessors, you would find no mercy in their grim faces." Such, doubtless, is the effect of the scene on some men, but most surely on those who live in cities and read Thackeray. Glen Sligachan is, indeed, weird and silent, but in no true sense of the word repelling. The eye is satisfied at every step, the shadows and the silence only deepen the beauty, and the mood awakened is one, not of shapeless shuddering awe, but of brooding mystic joy.

Pause here, where your path is the dry bed of a torrent, and look yonder to the north-east. Between two hills opens the great gorge of Hart-o'-Corry, which is closed in again far away by a wall of livid stone. 'Tis broad day here, but gray twilight yonder.

In the hollow of the corry broods a dense vapour, and above it, down the deep green fissures of the hypersthene, trickle streams like threads of hoary silver, frozen motionless by distance; while higher, far above the rayless abyss, the sky is serene and hyacinthine blue. That black speck over the topmost peak, that little mark scarce bigger than the dot of an *i*, is an eagle; it hovers for many minutes motionless, and then melts imperceptibly away. From the side of Hart-o'-Corry, Scuir-na-Gillean shoots up its rugged columns; and close to the mouth of the corry, the sharply-defined sweep of the deep green hypersthene, overlying the pale yellow felspar, has an effect of rare beauty. Turning now, and looking up the glen towards Camasunary, you behold Ben Blaven closing in the view, and towering into the sky from precipice to precipice, its ashen gray flanks corroding everywhere into veins of mineral green, until it cuts the ether with a sharp hooked forehead of solid stone.

“ O wonderful mountain of Blaven!
How oft since our parting hour
You have roared with the wintry torrents,
You have gloomed through the thunder-shower!

O Blaven, rocky Blaven !
How I long to be with you again,
To see lashed gulf and gully
Smoke white in the windy rain—
To see in the scarlet sunrise
The mist-wreaths perish with heat ;
The wet rock slide with a trickling gleam
Right down to the cataract's feet ;
While toward the crimson islands,
Where the sea-birds flutter and skirl,
A cormorant flaps o'er a sleek ocean floor
Of tremulous mother-of-pearl.”*

Blaven stands alone, separated from the chain of Cuchullins proper, and with the arms of the Red Hills encircling him and offering tribute. It is seldom he deigns to put aside his crown of mist, but on this golden day he is unkinged. “The sunbeam pours its light stream before him ; his hair meets the wind of his hills, his face is settled from war, the calm dew of the morning lies on the hill of roses, for the sun is faint on his side, and the lake is settled and blue in the vale.”

It is thus, as we gaze, that the thin sound of the voice of Cona breaks in upon our meditations ; “O bard ! I hear thy voice : it is pleasant as the gale

* Alexander Smith.

of the spring that sighs on the hunter's ear, when he wakens from dreams of joy, and has heard the music of the spirits of the hill." In the dreamy wanderings of our mind we had almost forgotten Ossian, the true spirit of the mystic scene. Oh! ye ghosts of the lonely Cromla! Ye souls of chiefs that are no more! ye are "like a beam that has shone, like a mist that has fled away." "The sons of song are gone to rest." But one voice remains, strange and sad, "like a blast that roars loudly on a sea-surrounded rock, after the winds are laid."

What the Cuchullins are to all other British mountains, Ossian is to all other British bards. He abides in his place, neither greater nor less, challenging comparison with no one, solitary, sad, wrapt in eternal twilight. Just in the same way as Glen Sligachan repelled Alexander Smith, the song of Ossian tires and wearies Brown and Robinson: fashionable once, it is now in disrepute; by Byron, Goethe, and Napoleon cherished as a solemn inspiration, and lately pooh-poohed as conventional and artificial by the Saturday Reviewer, it abides forgotten, like Blaven, till such time as humorous

critics may care to patronise it again. It keeps its place, though, as surely as Scur-na-Gillean and Blaven keep theirs. It is based on the rock, and will endure. Meantime, let us for once join issue with Mr. Arnold, and exclaim, "Woody Morven, and echoing Lora, and Selma with its silent halls—we all owe them a debt of gratitude; and when we are unjust enough to forget it, may the Muse forget us!"*

As to the question of authenticity, that need not be introduced at this time of day. Gibbon's sneer and Johnson's abuse prove nothing. In this, as in all matters, Gibbon was a sceptic, as worthy to be heard on Ossian as Voltaire on Shakespeare, or Gigadibs on Walt Whitman. In this, as in everything else, Johnson was a bully, a dear, lovable, shortsighted bully, as fit to listen to Fingal as to paint the scenery of the Cuchullins. The philological battle still rages; but few of those competent to judge now doubt that Macpherson did receive Gaelic MSS., that the originals of his translations were really found in the Highlands—that, in a word,

* 'On the Study of Celtic Literature.' By Matthew Arnold.

Macpherson's Ossian is a bona-fide attempt to render into English a traditional poetic literature similar in origin and history to the Homeric poems.* Truly has it been said that "Ossian drew into himself every lyrical runnel, augmented himself in every way, drained centuries of their songs; and living an oral and gipsy life, handed down from generation to generation without being committed to writing, and having their outlines determinately fixed, these songs become vested in a multitude, every reciter having more or less to do to them. For centuries the floating legendary material was reshaped, added to, and altered by the changing spirit and emotion of the Celt." What remains to us is a set of titanic fragments, which, like the scattered boulders and *blocs perchés* of Glen Sligachan,

* Since this paper was written and printed, the Rev. Mr. Clark has published his two exhaustive volumes of Ossian, containing the Gaelic originals, Macpherson's translation, and a new literal version, with a capital preliminary dissertation and invaluable illustrative notes. Mr. Clark has the reputation of being the best Celtic scholar in the Highlands, and his work is a monument that will not perish as long as men care to study at the fountain-head a poetry which, be it ever so faulty, is one of the great literary influences of the world.

show where a mighty antique landscape once existed. The translation of Macpherson, made as it was by a scholar familiar with modern literature, has numberless touches showing that the chisel has been used to polish the original granite, but it is on the whole a marvellous bit of workmanship, strong, free, subtle, full of genius—better than any English translation of the Iliad, nearer to the true antique than Chapman's, or Pope's, or Derby's, or Blackie's versions of the Greek. In this translation, retranslated, Goethe read it; and Napoleon; and each stole something from it, if only a phrase. Veritably, at first sight, it has a barbarous look. The prose breathes heavily, in a series of gasps, each gasp a sentence. The sound is to a degree monotonous, like the voice of the wind; it rises and falls, that is all, breaks occasionally into a shriek, dies sometimes into a sob; but it is always a wind-like voice. Yet just as hour after hour we have sat by the fireside, hearkening to the wind itself, feeling the sadness of Nature creep into the soul and subdue it, so have we sat listening to the sad "sound of the voice of Cona." It is a wind, a wind passing among mountains. Only a sound, yet the

soul follows it out into the darkness—where it blows the beard from the thistle on the ruin, where it mists the pictures in the moonlight mere, where it meets the shadows shivering in the desolate corry, where it dies away with a divine whisper on the fringe of the mystic sea. A wind only, but a voice crying, “I have seen the walls of Balclutha, but they were desolate. The fire had resounded in the halls, and the voice of the people is heard no more. The stream of Clutha was removed from its place by the fall of the walls. The thistle shook there its lonely head; the moss whistled to the wind. The fox looked out from the windows; the rank grass of the wall waved round his head.” It is an eerie wail out of the solitude. We are blown hither and thither on it, through the mists of Morven, over the livid Cuchullins, through the terror of tempest, the dewy dimness of dawn—where the heroes are fighting, where a thousand shields clang—where rises the smoke of the ruined home, the moan of the desolate children—where the dead bleed, and “the hawks of heaven come from all their winds to feed on the foes of Auner”—where the sea rolls far distant, and the

white foam is like the sails of ships—where the narrow house looks pleasant in the waste, and “the gray stone of the dead.” But ever and anon we pause listening, and know that we are hearkening to a sound only, to the lonely cry of the wind.

After all, it is unfair to call this monotonousness a demerit. Ossian's poems have much more in common with the *Theogony* than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Ulysses and Thersites were comparatively modern products of the Greek Epos. In the Ossianic period humanity dwelt in the twilight which precedes the dawn of culture. The heroes are not only colossal, but shadowy—dim in a dim light—figures vaguer than any in the *Eddas*: you see the gleam of their eyes, the flash of their swords, you hear the solemn sound of their voices; but they never laugh, and if they uplift a festal cup, it is with solemn arm-sweep and hushed speech. The landscape where they move is this landscape of Glen Sligachan, with a frequent glimpse of woodier Morven, and a far-off glimmer of the western sea: all this shadowy, for the “morning is gray on Cromla,” or the “pale light of the night is sad.” “I sit by the mossy fountain; on

the top of the hill of wind. One tree is rustling above me. Dark waves roll over the heath. The lake is troubled below. The deer descend from the hill. It is midday, but all is silent." This is a day picture, but there is little sunlight. It is in this atmosphere that some readers expect variety. They weary of the wind, and the gray stone on the waste, and the shadows of heroes. O for one gleam of humour, of the quick spirit of life! they cry. As well might they look for Falstaff in the Iliad, or for Browning's Broad Church Pope in Shakespeare! Blaven and his brethren are not mirth-breeding; nor is Ossian. Here in the waste, and there in the book, humanity fades far off; though coming from both, we drink with fresher breath the strong salt air of the free waves of the world.

In these days of metre-mongers, in these days when poetry is a tinkling cymbal or a pretty picture, when Art has got hold of her sister Muse and bedaubed her with unnatural colour, we might well expect the public to be indifferent to Ossian. Not the least objection to the Gael, in the eyes of library-readers, is the peculiar gasping prose in which the

translation is written : and it is an objection ; yet it affords scope for passages of wonderful melody, just as does the prose of Plato, or of Shakespeare,* or the semi-Biblical line of Walt Whitman. “ Before the left side of the car is seen the snorting horse ! The thin-maned, high-headed, strong-hoofed, fleet-bounding son of the hill ; his name is Dusronnal, among the stormy sons of the sword.” Such a passage is prose as fully acceptable as a more literal translation, broken up into lines like the original :

“ By the other side of the chariot
Is the arch-neck'd, snorting,
Narrow-maned, high-mettled, strong-hoofed,
Swift-footed, wide-nostril'd steed of the mountains ;
Dusrongeal is the name of the horse.”

Music in our own day having run to tune, in poetry as in everything else, we eschew unrhymed metres and poetical prose ; yet it is as legitimate to call Beethoven a barbarian as to abuse Ossian and Whitman for their want of melody. And as to the charge that Ossian lacks *humour*, where in our other British

* Take Hamlet's speech about himself (commencing “ I have of late, but wherefore I know not,” &c.) as an example of what Coleridge calls “ the wonderfulness of prose.”

poetry is humour so rife that we imperatively demand it from the Gael? Where is Milton's humour? or Shelley's? Where in contemporary poetry is there a grain of the divine salt of life, such as makes Chaucer prince of tale-tellers, and gladdens the academic period of rare Ben, and makes Falstaff lovable, and Bardolph's red nose delicious, and preserves the slovenly-scribbled 'Beggar's Opera' for all time? In sober truth, humour and worldly wisdom, and all we *blasés* moderns mean by variety, were scarcely created in the Ossianic period. Why, they are rare enough in the lonely Hebrides even now. Now, in the nineteenth century, the Celtic islander smiles as little as old Fingal or Cuthullin. His laugh is grim and deep; he is too far back in time to laugh lovingly. His loving mood is earnest, tearful, almost painful, sometimes full of a dim brightness, but never exuberant and joyful.

Yet we moderns, who love hoary old Jack for his sins, and stand tearfully at his bed of death,* and like

* "*Host.* Nay, sure, he's not in hell: he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. 'A made a finer end, and went away, an it had been any christom child; 'a parted even

all fat men and sinners better for his sake, we to whom life is the quaintest and drollest of all plays as well as the deepest and divinest of all mysteries, may listen very profitably, ever and anon, to the monotonous wail of Cona, may pass a brooding hour in the twilight shadow of this eerie poetry. The influence of Ossian upon us is quite specific: not religious at all; not merely ghostly; but solemn and sad and beautiful; with just enough life to preserve a thread of human interest; with too little life to awaken us from the mood of brooding mystic feeling produced by the lonely landscape, and the dim dawn, and the changeful moon. Ossian dreams not of a Supreme

just between twelve and one, e'en at turning o' the tide: for after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields. 'How now, Sir John?' quoth I: 'what, man! be of good cheer.' So 'a cried out 'God, God, God!' three or four times: now I, to comfort him, bid him, 'a should not think of God; I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So, 'a bade me lay more clothes on his feet: I put my hand into the bed, and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone; then I felt to his knees, and so upward and upward, and all was as cold as any stone."—*Henry V.*, ii. 3.

Being, has no religious feelings, but he believes in gracious spirits "fair as the ghost of the hill, when it moves in a sunbeam at noon, over the silence of Morven." If there is no humour in his poems, there is a great deal of exquisitely human tenderness. Nothing can be more touching in its way than the death of Fellan: "Ossian, lay me in that hollow rock. Raise no stone above me, lest one should ask about my fame. I am fallen in the first of my fields, fallen without renown." Perfect in its way, too, is the imagery in the lament of Malvina over the death of Oscar: "I was a lovely tree in thy presence, Oscar! with all my branches round me. But thy breath came like a blast 'from the desert and laid my green head low. The spring returned with its showers, but no leaf of mine arose."

Sweetest and tenderest of all Ossian's songs, the song which fills the soul here in the gorges of Glen Sligachan, is "Berrathon," the "last sound of the voice of Cona." It is a wind indeed, strange and tender, deep and true. All the strife is hushed now, Malvina the beautiful is dead, and the old bard, knowing that his hour is drawing nigh, murmurs

over a fair legend of the past. "Such were my deeds, son of Appin, when the arm of my youth was young. But I am alone at Lutha. My voice is like the last sound of the wind, when it forsakes the woods. But Ossian shall not be long alone; he sees the mist that shall receive his ghost; he beholds the mist that shall form his robe when he appears on his hills. The sons of feeble men shall behold me and admire the stature of the chiefs of old. They shall creep to their caves. . . . Lead, son of Appin, lead the aged to his woods. The winds begin to rise; the dark wave of the lake resounds. . . . Bring me the harp, son of Appin. Another song shall arise. My soul shall depart in the sound. . . . Bear the mournful sound away to Fingal's airy hall; bear it to Fingal's hall, that he may hear the voice of his son. . . . The blast of north opens thy gates. O king! I behold thee sitting on mist, dimly gleaming in all thine arms. Thy form now is not the terror of the valiant. It is like a watery cloud, when we see the stars behind it with their weeping eyes. Thy shield is the aged moon: thy sword a vapour half kindled with fire. Dim and feeble is

the chief who travelled in brightness before. . . . I hear the voice of Fingal. Long has it been absent from mine ear! 'Come, Ossian, come away!' he says. . . . 'Come Ossian, come away!' he says. 'Come, fly with thy fathers on clouds.' I come, I come, thou king of men. The life of Ossian fails. I begin to vanish on Cona. My steps are not seen in Selma. Beside the stone of Mora I shall fall asleep. The winds whistling in my gray hair shall not awaken me. . . . Another race shall arise." If this be not a veritable voice, then poesy is dumb indeed. The desolate cry of Lear is not more real.

Read these poems to-day on Glen Sligachan, or on the slopes of Blaven. Is not the solemn grayness everywhere? Is there a touch, a tint, of the quiet landscape lost? Not that Ossian described Nature; that was left for the modern. He contrives, however, while using the simplest imagery, while never pausing to transcribe, to conjure up before us the very spirit of such scenes as this. Mere description, however powerful, is of little avail; and painting is not much better. Ossian's verse resembles Loch

Corruisk more closely than Turner's picture, powerful and suggestive as that picture is.

While we are listening to the thin voice of Cona, and being betrayed into a monologue, our exploring party is getting well ahead; and turning off across a marshy hollow to the right, guide and ponies begin to clamber up the sides of a hill,—one of the sandy Red Hills, the shoulder of which overlooks the lonely lake of which we are in quest. The dog Schneider has vanished in frantic pursuit of some imaginary game,—no, there she is, dwarfed to the size of a mouse, creeping along a seemingly inaccessible crag. Shouts are of no avail; they only make the hills moan. But look! what is that little group far above her? Deer, by Jove—red deer, browsing, actually browsing, in a hollow that seems as stony and innocent of all herbage as a doorstep, and looking in their unconcern about the size of sheep. The field-glass brings them aggravatingly close, and a noble group they are—harts as well as hinds. O Hamish, Hamish Shaw, what a place for a stalk! A stiff walk round yonder shoulder, half a mile to leeward—a covered approach for a mile behind that

ridge—then a creep along the dry bed of a torrent, steadily, oh how steadily, lest a rattle of small stones should spoil all—then a crawl on one's belly to the great boulder to leeward of them—and *then*, Hamish, a cool pulse, a steady aim, and the finest set of antlers there! To look on, gunless, hopeless, is almost more than flesh and blood can endure. Natural scenery, Ossian, mysticism, are forgotten in a moment. Ah, but they had the best of it—those old heroes of the chase, those seekers of perilous adventures by flood and field; and Fingal stalked his stag in that era like a genuine sportsman! Come along, Hamish Shaw; let us turn our faces away, lest we cry with longing. See, though, the dog is winding them—she sees—she charges them. They stand their ground coolly, only one big fellow begins to tickle the earth with his antlers. Schneider's pace grows slower and more reflective. She expected to scatter them like wind, and she is amazed at their stolidity. Obviously thinking discretion the better part of valour, she pauses, and gazes at them from a distance of twenty yards. They don't stir, but gaze at her with uplifted heads.

At last, tired of the scrutiny, they turn slowly, very slowly, and walk, at a snail's pace, up the ravine; while Schneider, obviously staggered at the discovery that at least one kind of animal is quite a match for her, and won't scud out of her fiery path like a snipe or a rabbit, descends the hill dreamily—quite prepared to accept her thrashing in exchange for the half-hour's novel sport that she has had among the mountains.

How steadily the ponies make their way up this pathway, which is sometimes slippery as glass, sometimes crumbling like a ruin; they keep their feet, with only an occasional stumble, and do not appear the least bit exhausted by their efforts. Parts of the way are precipitous to a degree, parts are formed by the unstable bed of a shallow burn. At last the topmost ridge is gained, the riders dismount, and the guide, stripping the ponies of their saddles and bridles, turns them out to crop a noontide meal on the mossy ground. Lunch is thereupon spread out on a rock, and before casting one glance around them, the Wanderer and the other human machines begin to feed and drink, winding up the jaded body

to the point of rational enjoyment and spiritual perception.

The views from this hillside—the usual point sought by tourists from Sligachan—are inferior in beauty to many we have seen *en route*, but they are very grand. One glimpse, indeed, of the peaks of Scur-na-Gillean, seen peeping jagged over an intervening chain of mountain, is beyond all parallel magnificent. The view of Loch Corruisk,* for which the tourists come, is simply disappointing. Only one corner of the loch is visible, lying below at a distance of about two miles, and gives not the faintest idea of its grandeur. The usual plan adopted by good walkers is to descend to the side of Corruisk, leaving the guide to await their return on the summit of the ridge.

But on the present occasion, the Wanderer has determined to pass the summer night here in the solitude, leaving the rest of the party to return alone—all save the faithful henchman Hamish, on whose back is strapped a waterproof sleeping-bag, a box of apparatus for cooking breakfast, &c. Schneider,

* Anglicé, the “Corry of the Water.”

too, will remain, constant as ever to her liege lord and master. So, after a parting caulker with the men, and a good-night's kiss from the lady, the Wanderer whistles his dog and plunges down the hill at his favourite headlong rate, while Hamish, more heavily loaded, follows leisurely with the swinging gait, slow but steady, peculiar to mariners of all sorts on land. A very short run brings the Wanderer to the shores of Lochan Dhu, a dark and desolate tarn, situated high up on the hillside, and surrounded by wild stretches of marsh and rock and bog. Standing here for a moment, he waves a last farewell to the party on the peak, who stand far above him, darkly silhouetted against the sky.

CHAPTER VIII.

CORRUISK ; OR, THE CORRY OF THE WATER.

The Lone Water—The Region of Twilight—*Blocs Perchés*—Hamish Shaw's Views—The Cave of the Ghost—The Dunvegan Pilot's Story—Echoes, Mists, and Shadows—Squalls in Loch Scavaig—A Highlander's Ideas of Beauty—Camping out in the Corry—A Stormy Dawn—The Fishermen and the Strange Harbour—Loch Scavaig—The Spar Cave—Cama-sunary.

OUT of the gloomy breast of Lochan Dhu issues a brawling burn, which plunges from shelf to shelf downward, here narrowing to a rush-fringed rapid, there broadening out into miniature meres that glitter golden in the sunlight and are full of tiny trout, and in more than one place overflowing incontinently, and breaking up into rivulets and scattered pools, interspersed with huge boulders, moss-grown stones, and clumps of vari-coloured heather.

With the burn for his guide, the Wanderer sped, more than once missing his leaps from stone to stone, and cooling his heated legs in the limpid water, and, indeed, rather courting the bath than otherwise, so pleasantly the water prattled and sparkled. The afternoon was well advanced now, and still not a cloud came to destroy the golden glory of the day. The sun had drunk all the dew off the heather, and the very bogs looked dry and brown. Below, there was a glimpse of the Lone Water, glassy, calm, and black as ebony. A few steps downward, still downward, and the golden day was dimming into shadow. Coming suddenly on Loch Corruisk, the Wanderer seemed in a moment surrounded with twilight. He paused close to the corry, on a rocky knoll, with the hot sun in his eyes; but before him the shadows lay moveless—not a glimmer of sunlight touched the solemn Mere—everywhere the place brooded in its own mystery, silent, beautiful, and dark.

To speak in the first place by the card, Corruisk, or the Corry of the Water, is a wild gorge, oval in shape, about three miles long and a mile broad, in

the centre of which a sheet of water stretches for about two miles, surrounded on every side by rocky precipices totally without vegetation and towering in one sheer plane of livid rock, until they mingle with the wildly picturesque and jagged outlines of the topmost peak of the Cuchullins. Directly on entering its sombre darkness, the student is inevitably reminded of the awful region of Malebolge :

“Luogo è in Inferno detto Malebolge
Tutto di pietra e di color ferrigno,
Come la cerchia, che d'intorno 'l volge.”

The Mere is black as jet, its waters only broken and brightened by four small grassy islands, on the edges of the largest of which that summer day the black-backed gulls were sitting, with the feathery gleam of their shadows faintly breaking the glassy blackness below them. These islands form the only bit of vegetable green in all the lonely prospect. Close to the shores of the loch, and at the foot of the crags, there are dark brown stretches of heath; but the heights above them are leafless as the columns of a cathedral.

Coming abruptly on the shores of this loneliest of

lakes, the Wanderer had passed instantaneously from sunlight to twilight, from brightness to mystery, from the gladsome stir of the day to a silence unbroken by the movement of any created thing. Every feature of the scene was familiar to him—he had seen it in all weathers, under all aspects—yet his spirit was possessed as completely, as awe-stricken, as solemnised, as when he came thither out of the world's stir for the first time. The brooding desolation is there for ever. There was no sign to show that it had ever been broken by a human foot since his last visit. He left it in twilight, and in twilight he found it. Since he had departed, scarce a sunbeam had broken the darkness of the dead Mere; so close do the mountain pinnacles tower on all sides, that only when the sun is sheer above can the twilight be broken; and when it is borne in mind that the Cuchullins are the chosen lairs of all the winds, that their hollows are the dark breeding-places of all the monsters of storm, that scarce a day passes over them without mist and tears, one ceases to wonder at the unbroken darkness. A great cathedral is solemn, solemn still is such an island as Haskeir

when it sleeps silent amid the rainy grief of a dead still sea, but Corruisk is beyond all expression solemnest of all. Perpetual twilight, perfect silence, terribly brooding desolation. Though there are a thousand voices on all sides—the voices of winds, of wild waters, of shifting crags—they die away here into a heart-beat. See! down the torn cheeks of all those precipices tear headlong torrents white in foam, and each is crying, though you cannot hear it. Only one low murmur, deeper than silence, fills the dead air. The black water laps silently on the dark claystone shingle of the shore. The cloud passes silently, far away over the melancholy peaks.

Streams innumerable come from all directions to pour themselves into the abyss; and enormous fragments of stone lie everywhere, as if freshly fallen from the precipices, while many of these gigantic boulders, as MacCulloch observes, are “poised in such a manner on the very edges of the precipitous rocks on which they have fallen, as to render it difficult to imagine how they could have rested in such places, though the presence of *snow* at the time of their fall may perhaps explain this difficulty.” These,

indeed, are the true *blocs perchés*, marking the course of the glacier which once invaded these wilds. "The interval between the borders of the lake and the side of Garsven is strewed with them ; the whole, of whatever size, lying on the surface in a state of uniform freshness and integrity, unattended by a single plant or atom of soil, as if they had all but recently fallen in a single shower." The mode in which they lie is no less remarkable. The bottom of the valley is covered with rocky eminences, of which the summits are not only bare, but often very narrow, while their declivities are always steep, and often perpendicular. Upon these rocks the fragments lie just as on the more level ground. One, weighing about one hundred tons, has become a rocking stone ; another, of not less than fifty, stands on the narrow edge of a rock a hundred feet higher than that ground, which must have first met it in the descent.

"Mighty rocks,

Which have from unimaginable years
Sustained themselves with terror and with toil
Over a gulf, and with the agony
With which they cling seem slowly coming down ;
Even as a wretched soul hour after hour

Clings to the mass of life ; yet, clinging, lean ;
And, leaning, make more dark the dread abyss
In which they fear to fall." * .

Strangely beautiful as is the scene, it is a ruin. The vast fragments are the remains of a magnificent temple rising into pinnacles and minarets of ice, glittering with all the colours of the prism. Here the silent-footed glacier slipped, and the snow shifted under the footsteps of the wind, and there perhaps, where the lonely lake lies, glittered a cold sheet of hyacinthine blue ; and no gray rain-cloud brooded on the temple's dome—only delicate spirits of the vapour, drinking soft radiance from the light of sun and star. Around this temple crawled the elk and bear, and swift-footed mountain deer. Summer after summer it abode in beauty, not stable like temples built by hands, but ever changing, full of the low murmur of its change, the melancholy sound of its own shifting walls and domes. Then more than once Fire swept out of the abyss, and clung like a snake about the temple, while Earthquake, like a chained monster, groaned below ; wild elements came from all the winds to overthrow it ; wall after

* Shelley's 'Cenci.'

wall fell, fragment after fragment was dashed down. The fairy fretwork of snow melted, the fair carvings of ice were obliterated, pinnacle and minaret dissolved in the sun, like the baseless fragment of a vision. Dark twilight settled on the ruin, and Melancholy marked it for her own. The walls of livid rock remain, gray from the volcano, and torn into rugged rents, casting perpetual darkness downward, where the water bubbling up from unseen abysses has spread itself into a mirror. All ruins are sad, but this is sad utterly. All ruins are beautiful, but this is beautiful beyond expression. The solemn Spirit of Death comes more or less to all ruins, whenever the meditative mind conjures and wishes; but here it abides, at once overshadowing whosoever approaches by the still sense of doom. "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, O Mount Seir, I am against thee, and I will make thee most desolate. When the whole earth rejoiceth, I will make thee desolate." The fiat has also been spoken here. The place has been solemnised to desolation.

In deep unutterable awe does the human visitant explore with timid eye the mighty crags above him,

the layers of volcanic stone, until he finds himself fascinated by the strange outlines of the peaks where they touch the sky, and detecting fancied resemblances to things that live. Yonder crouches, black and distinct against the light, a maned beast, like a lion, watching; its eyes invisible, but fixed doubtless on yours. Higher still is a dimmer outline, as of some huge bird, winged like the griffin. These two resemblances infect the whole scene instantaneously. There are shapes everywhere—in the peaks, in the gorges, by the torrents—living shapes, or phantoms, frozen still to listen, or to watch; and horrifying you with their deathly silence. Your heart leaps as if something were going to happen; and you feel if the stillness were suddenly broken, and these shapes were to spring into motion, you would shriek and faint.

How dark and fathomless look the abysses yonder, at the head of the loch! A wild scarf of mist is folding itself round the peaks (betokening surely that the clear still weather will not remain much longer unbroken), and faint gray light travels along the wildly indented wall beneath. It

is not two miles to the base of the crags, yet the distance seems interminable; and shadows, shifting and deepening, weary the eye with mysterious and dimly-reflected vistas.

As one paces up the aisle of some vast temple, the Wanderer walked thither, threading his way among gigantic boulders, which in some wild hour have been torn loose and dashed down from the heights. He felt dwarfed to the utter significance of a pigmy, small as a mouse crawling on the pavement of the great cathedral at Cologne.

A voice broke in upon his musings.

“I’ve travelled far, and seen heaps o’ places,” says Hamish Shaw, whom the Wanderer had altogether forgotten; “but I never saw the like of this. It’s no’ a canny place. Glen Sannox is wild, but this is awesome. Is it no’ strange that the Lord should make a place like this, for no use to man or beast?”

This was a question involving so many philosophical issues, that the Wanderer did not like to make any decided answer. Instead of replying, he asked Hamish if he had never been in the locality before.

“Ay, once, years ago, when I was but a lad.

The herring were in Loch Scavaig, and the harbour out yonder was just a causeway o' fishing-boats, and there were fires on shore, and plenty of folk to make it look cheery like. We were here a week, and we didna see a soul ashore, but one day an old piper coming in his Sabbath claise frae a wedding far o'er among the hills, and he was that fu' * that he had burstit his pipes, and lost his bonnet; and, with his gray hair blowing in his een, he looked like the Deil. We keepit him a night till he was sober; and when he waken'd, he was that mad about his pipes, that he was for louping † into the sea. I mind fine o' him vanishing up the hills yonder, as white as death; and Lord kens if he ever reach'd hame, for it rained that night like to drown the world, and you couldna see the length o' your arm for reek." ‡

As he walked on in the track of the Wanderer, Shaw still pursued his own reminiscences aloud.

"For a' that, there wasna a fisherman would hae willingly come this length alane—they were that fear'd o' the place, most of a' in the gloaming. It's more fearsome without a house, or folk, or sae much

* Drunk.

† Jumping.

‡ Mist.

as a sheep feeding; naething but stanes and darkness. There were auld men among us that had strange tales, and liked to fright the lads, though they were just as frightit themsel's. There's a cave up there called the Cave o' the Ghost, and the taisch* o' a shepherd has been seen in it sitting cross-leggit, and branding a bluidy sheep. But the drollest thing e'er I heard o' Loch Corruisk was frae an auld pilot o' Dunvegan, whose folk had dwelt yonder on the far side o' Garsven. He minded fine, when he was a wean, his grandfather would gang awa' for days, and come back wi' his pouch full o' precious stanes the size o' seeds and the colour o' blood. He would tell nae man how or where he found them; and though they tried to watch him, he was o'er cunning. More than once he came back wi' gold. He sent the gold and stanes south, and was weel paid for them. It was whispered about that he had sold himsel' to the Deil, at night, here by the loch; and he didna deny it. He came back one day sick, and took to his bed wi' the influenza fever; and he ravit till the priest came, and before he dee'd he

* Spirit.

cried till the priest that the gold and stanes had changed his heart wi' greed, and he was fear'd to face his God. One day he had wander'd himsel',* and night came on him, and he creepit into a cave to sleep; and when the day came, he saw strange marks like writing all o'er the walls. When he keekit closer, he saw the stanes, and they were that loose he could free them wi' his gully,† and he filled his pouches, shaking a' the time wi' fear. But the strangest thing of a' was this—he wasna the first man that had been there, for at the mouth o' the cave there was the coulter o' a plough, and twa old brogues rotten wi' dirt and rain."

"Did this description enable his relations to find the place?" asked the Wanderer, much interested.

"They search'd and search'd," answered Hamish, "but they couldna find it, and they gave it up in despair. After that his folk didna thrive; and the man that told me the tale was the only ane o' them left. I've heard tell that 'twas true the old man had sold himsel' to the Deil, and that the cave, and the strange writing, and a' that, were just magic

* Lost his path.

† Clasp-knife.

to beguile his een; but it's strange. I'm of the opinion that the cave might be found yet, for gold and stanes couldna come o' naething. If it hadna been for the auld man's greed, his folk might hae thriven."

"Do you think you would have kept the secret if you had been in his place?"

"I'm no' sae sure," answered Hamish, after a pause. "Ye see, 'twas a sair temptation, for a man's ain folk are whiles the hardest against him aboot siller. It was the safest way, but a bad way for ither folk. He should hae put the marks o' the place in writing, for use after his death."

Hamish's story, with its quaint touches of realism, only made the lonely scene more lone, adding as it did a touch of human eerieness to the associations connected with it. An appropriate abode, surely, for one of those evil Spirits of whom we read in Teutonic romance, and who were prepared, in exchange for a little document signed with the party's blood, to load the lost mortal with gems and gold! This was a fleeting impression, only lasting a moment. Another glance at those dimly-lighted walls, that darkly-brooding water, those sublime peaks now

beginning to disappear in the fast-gathering white vapour—one more look around the lonely corry—served to show that it is too silent, too ethereally thoughtful, to be haunted by such vulgar spirits as those that figure in popular superstition. The popular ghost would be as out of place there as inside a church. To break for a moment the dead monotony, the Wanderer cast a stone into the water, and Schneider, barking furiously, plunged into the water. Hark! a thousand voices barked an answer! We shouted aloud, and the hills reverberated. The cries of men and the barking of dogs faded far off like the ghostly voices of the Wild Huntsmen among the Harz Mountains. Echo cried to echo :

“ As multitudinous a harmony
Of sounds as rang the heights of Latmos over,
When, from the soft couch of her sleeping lover
Upstarting, Cynthia skimmed the mountain dew
In keen pursuit, and gave where'er she flew
Impetuous motion to the stars above her !”

Truly, there were spirits among the peaks, but not such spirits as Defoe chronicled, and the Pough-keepsie Seer summons ; nay, gentle ghosts, “with eyes as fair as starbeams among twilight trees ;”

phantoms of the delicate ether, not arrayed in vulgar horrors, but soft as the breath of Cytherea.

“Mountain winds, and babbling springs,
And mountain seas, that are the voice
Of these inexplicable things!”

The home of Mystery is far removed from that of Terror, and he who approaches it, as we did then, is held by the tenderest fibres of his soul, instead of being galvanised into gaping abjection. God's profoundest agents are as tender as they are powerful. Their breath, invisible as the wind, troubles the fount of divine tears which distils itself, drop by drop, in every human thing, however strong, however dark and cold.

We were now at the head of the loch. Sir Walter Scott, in the notes of his visit to Skye, describes the Cuchullins as rising “so perpendicularly from the water's edge, that Borrowdale or even Glencoe is a jest to them;” but Sir Walter only surveyed the scene from the far end of the corry, where it opens on the sea.* So far

* Sir Walter's prose account of his visit to Corruisk is so interesting that we subjoin it in full:—“The ground on which we

from rising perpendicular from the water's edge, the mountains slope gradually upward from stony layer

walked was the margin of a lake, which seemed to have sustained the constant ravage of torrents from these rude neighbours. The shores consisted of huge strata of naked granite, here and there intermixed with bogs, and heaps of gravel and sand piled in the empty watercourses. Vegetation there was little or none; and the mountains rose so perpendicularly from the water edge, that Borrowdale, or even Glencoe, is a jest to them. We proceeded a mile and a half up this deep, dark, and solitary lake, which was about two miles long, half a mile broad, and is, as we learned, of extreme depth. The murky vapours which enveloped the mountain ridges obliged us by assuming a thousand varied shapes, changing their drapery into all sorts of forms, and sometimes clearing off altogether. It is true the mist made us pay the penalty by some heavy and downright showers, from the frequency of which a Highland boy, whom we brought from the farm, told us the lake was popularly called the Water-kettle. The proper name is Loch Corriskin, from the deep corrie, or hollow, in the mountains of Cuilin, which affords the basin for this wonderful sheet of water. It is as exquisite a savage scene as Loch Katrine is a scene of romantic beauty. After having penetrated so far as distinctly to observe the termination of the lake under an immense precipice, which rises abruptly from the water, we returned, and often stopped to admire the ravages which storms must have made in the recesses, where all human witnesses were driven to places of more shelter and security. Stones, or rather large masses and fragments of rocks of a composite kind, perfectly different from the strata of the lake, were scattered upon the bare rocky beach, in the strangest and most

to layer, and at their base is a plain of grass as green as emerald, through which a small river, after draining the silent dews of the hills, wanders to Corruisk. Where we stood, surrounded by the colossal fragments of ruin, on the rough rock of the

precarious situations, as if abandoned by the torrents which had borne them down from above. Some lay loose and tottering upon the ledges of the natural rock, with so little security that the slightest push moved them, though their weight might exceed many tons. These detached rocks, or stones, were chiefly what are called plum-pudding stones. The bare rocks, which formed the shore of the lake, seemed quite pathless and inaccessible, as a huge mountain, one of the detached ridges of the Cuilin hills, sinks in a profound and perpendicular precipice down to the water. On the left-hand side, which we traversed, rose a higher and equally inaccessible mountain, the top of which strongly resembled the shivered crata of an exhausted volcano. I never saw a spot in which there was less appearance of vegetation of any kind. The eye resting on nothing but barren and naked crags, and the rocks on which we walked by the side of the loch were as bare as the pavements of Cheapside. There are one or two small islets in the loch, which seem to bear juniper, or some such low bushy shrub. Upon the whole, though I have seen many scenes of more extensive desolation, I never witnessed any in which it pressed me more deeply upon the eye and the heart than at Loch Corriskin; at the same time that its grandeur elevated and redeemed it from the wild and dreary character of utter barrenness."

solid hillside, the darkness deepened. Vapours were gathering above us, shutting out the hill-tops from our gaze. Out of every fissure and crevasse, from behind every fragment of stone, a white shape of mist stole, small or huge, and hovered like a living thing. The invisible sun was now declining to the west, and the air growing chilly after the great heat of the day.

It was time now to seek a corner wherein we might pass the night with tolerable comfort. This was soon done. One huge stone stretched out its top like a roof, the rock beneath was dry and snug, and close at hand a little stream bubbled by, crystalline and cold. "Spread out the rugs, Hamish Shaw, light the spirit-lamp, and make all snug." It was as cosy as by the fore-castle fire. Cold beef and bread went down gloriously, with cold caulkers from the spring; but we wound up, if you please, with a jorum of toddy as stiff as head could stand. Heat the water over the spirit-lamp, drop in the sugar, and you have a beverage fit for the gods. You, Hamish, take yours neat, and you are wise. Now, having lit our pipes, and stretched ourselves out for

a siesta, do we envy the ease of any wight in Christendom?

“The night will be a good night,” said Hamish; “but I’m thinking there’ll be wind the morn,* and here, when it blows, it rains. When I was here wi’ the *Heatherbell*, at the time I was speaking o’, I dinna mind o’ a dry day—a day without showers. I ne’er saw the hills as clear as they were this forenoon. There’s aye wind among the gullies yonder, and the squalls at Sligachan are naething to what ye hae here. I wouldna sail about Scavaig in a lugsail skiff—no’ if I had the sheet in my hand, and the sail nae bigger than a clout—in the finest day in summer. It strikes down on ye like the blows o’ a hammer—right, left, ahint, before, straight down on your head, right up under your nose—coming from Lord kens where, though the sea be smooth as my cheek. I’ve seen the punt heeling o’er to the gunnel with neither mast nor sail. I mind o’ seeing a brig carry away her topmast, and tear her foresail like a rag, on a day when we would hae been carrying

* *i. e.*, To-morrow morning.

just a reef in the mainsail o' the *Tern*; and I've seen the day when the fishing-boats running out o' the wee harbour there would be taking their sails on and off, as the puffs came, twenty times in as many minutes. Many's the life's been lost off Skye, wi' the damn'd wind frae these hills. They're for nae good to the beasts—the very deer are starved in them—and they catch every mist frae the western ocean, and soock the wind out o' its belly, and shoot it out again on Scavaig like a cannon-ball. Is it no' strange there should be such places, for nae use to man?"

"They are very beautiful to look at; Shaw," observed the Wanderer, "you cannot deny that; and beautiful things have a use of their own, you know. Look up there, where the mists are dividing and burning red round the edges o' that peak, and tell me if you ever saw anything more splendid."

"I'll no' deny," says Shaw, glancing up with little enthusiasm, "I'll no deny that it looks awesome; and it's hard for a common man like me to tell the taste o' learn'd men and gentry. They gang snooving about, and see bonnieness where the folk

o' the place see naething but ugliness. But put it to yoursel'. Just supposing you had a twin brother, and your father had left your brother a green farm o' five hunderd acres, and gien this place for a birthright to yoursel', what would ye hae said then? There's no' an acre o' green grass, nor a tree where a bird might build, nor a handfu' o' earth to plow or harrow! Ye're smiling, but ye wouldna smile if you depended on this place for your drop o' milk and bit o' porridge. This may be awesome; but green long grass, and trees, and the kye crying, and the birds singing, and the smell o' the farmyard wherever you keek, that's the kind o' place for a man to spend his days in."

And here let us remark that the grim, sunburnt, hirsute Celt—our philosophic Hamish, as independent as Socrates of schools and dogmas—was right enough, with all his bigotry. Corruisk is well at times, but it lacks the greenness of the true living world—and the intellectual mood it awakens is a purely cultivated mood, impossible to man in his natural state. The English gentleman, arriving

from Kent or Sussex, *blasé* with English flats, surfeited of harvests, comes to such a scene as this to be galvanised; and the wild, weird prospect, the utter silence and desolation, speak to him with intensest spiritual power, because they are so unlike the monotonous paths he treads daily. The Celt, on the other hand, who is from boyhood familiar with the waste wilderness, tenanted only by the deer and the eagle, and with the enormous sheep-farm stretching from hill to hill, comes upon a green spot, where leaves sprout, and birds sing, and flowers bud at the tree-roots, and at once realizes his dreams of earthly loveliness. Unlike the fair-weather tourist who surveys the terrors of Nature for one inspired moment, the Highlander knows the meaning of storm, cold, poverty, and hunger; and when he pictures an Inferno, it is not one of insufferable flame, but rather Dante's last circle—a frozen realm.* What wonder, then, that such a man should find all the dreamy poetry of his nature awakened by the happy homestead bosomed in greenness, the waving fields of harvest hard by,

* The Celtic *Ifurin*, or the Isle of the Cold Clime.

the pleasant country road, with plump farm-women driving their pony-carts to market, the stream that waters the meadow-land and turns the mill—all the sights and sounds that indicate warmth, prosperity, and rural joy. The basis of all heavens is physical comfort, and the Celt's dream of heaven is a dream of the light and sunshine he seldom sees. "The valleys," says an old Gaelic chant, "were open and free to the ocean; trees loaded with leaves, which scarce moved to the light breeze, were scattered on the green slopes and rising grounds. The rude winds walked not on the mountain; no storm took its course through the sky. All was calm and bright; the pure sun of the autumn shone from its blue sky on the fields." We have wandered among the islands with all sorts of islanders, and ever found them moved most, like Hamish Shaw, by the tender oases of cultivated ground which are found here and there in the empty waste.

Let it not be imagined, however, that the wild scenery of the hills wherein they dwell, the fierce contentions of wind and rain and snow, exercise no fascination; they work subtly, secretly,

weaving their solemn tints into the very tissue of life itself, solemnising thought imperceptibly, troubling the spirit with mysterious emotion. More than most men, the Celt distinguishes between loving and liking. He likes the green pasture; but he loves the bare mountain. He likes warmth, comfort, and prosperity; but he loves loneliness, dreaminess, and home. So familiar is he with the mountain peak and the driving mist, so constant is their influence upon him, that he scarcely perceives them; yet transport him to flat lowlands, or into cities, and he pines for the desolate lake, and the silent hill-side. His love for them is unutterable, is the vital part of his existence. When he dreams, he sees the *fata morgana*, a cloud of delicious verdure suspended in the air; but it soon fades. He, like all men, yearns to the unknown and the unfamiliar; but such yearnings are not love.

So far as Hamish himself is concerned, what most moves him is the Sea. It is his true home, and he loves it in all its moods. Days and nights, months and years, it has rocked him on its bosom. He does not watch it with an artist's eye; but no artist could

linger over its looks more lovingly. It is no mere monster, repelling him like the sombre Cuchullins. No; the mighty sea means health and life—the wondrous shoals of herring peopling the waters like locusts, the cod and ling hovering like shadows on the silent deep sea-bank—the lobster in the tangled weed—all strange gifts from God, full of “use to man.” He has a finer eye for the beauty of a boat than any artist that ever drew. He knows the clouds as shepherds know their sheep. The voices of seabirds are a speech to him. As he looks on the wondrous watery fields, he sees in them both a harvest and a grave. The shadow of mystery and death dwells everywhere on the perilous prospect. And if, with such dreamy imaginations, he unconsciously blends the same quiet utilitarian feeling which the farmer has for his fields, and the huntsman for the prairie, why, perhaps it has only strengthened the emotions of joy he feels whenever he finds himself “at home” on the great waters.

After all, the solemn eerieness of the Corry must have been appealing more or less subtly to Hamish’s spirit, for ere long his chat drifted into the old

channel of superstition ; and as the rosy light of the sun grew dimmer on the peaks, and the hollow void blackened below, he now and then cast around him glances of troubled meaning. He talked again, as he has often talked before, of the Banshee, and the Taisch or second sight, and of witches and fays ; not committing himself to belief in their existence, but assuredly not quite unbelieving. While Hamish soliloquised, the Wanderer watched the dying sunlight, and dreamed—until the sound of his comrade's voice died away into an inarticulate murmur. It was such a scene as no tongue can describe, no pencil paint—the hills in their silentest hour, hushed like lambs around the feet of God. Not of wraiths, or corpse-lights, or any petty spirits that fret the common course of man, did the Wanderer think now ; no dark vapours of the brain interposed to perplex him ; but his soul turned, trembling like a star with its own lustrous yearning, to the Eternal Silences where broods the Almighty Father of the beautiful and wondrous world. In that moment, in that mood, without perfect religious confidence, yet with some faint feeling of awful communication with

the unseen Intelligence, did he find his prayer shaping itself into sound and form—faint, perhaps, as imaging what he felt, yet in some measure consecrated for other ears by the holy spirit of the scene.

I.

Desolate! How the peaks of ashen gray,
The smoky mists that drift from hill to hill,
The waters dark, anticipate this day
Death's sullen desolation. O, how still
The shadows come and vanish, with no will!
How still the melancholy waters lie,
How still the vapours of the under sky,
Mirror'd below, drift onward, and fulfil
The mandate as they mingle! Not a sound,
Save that deep murmur of a torrent near,
Breaketh the silence. Hush! the dark profound
Groans, as some gray crag loosens and falls sheer
To the abyss. Wildly I look around.
O Spirit of the Human, art Thou *here*?

II.

O Thou art beautiful! and Thou dost bestow
Thy beauty on this stillness.—Still as sheep
The hills lie under Thee; the waters deep
Murmur for joy of Thee; the voids below
Mirror Thy strange fair vapours as they flow;
And now, afar upon the ashen height,
Thou sendest down a radiant look of light,
So that the still peaks glisten, and a glow

Rose-coloured tints the little snowy cloud
 That poises on the highest peak of all.
 O Thou art beautiful!—the hills are bowed
 Beneath Thee; on Thy name the soft winds call—
 The monstrous ocean trumpets it aloud,
 The rain and snows intone it as they fall.

III.

Here by the sunless lake there is no air;
 Yet with how ceaseless motion, with how strange
 Flowing and fading, do the high mists range
 The gloomy gorges of the mountains bare.
 Some weary breathing never ceases there—
 The ashen peaks can feel it hour by hour;
 The purple depths are darkened by its power;
 A soundless breath, a trouble all things share
 That feel it come and go. See! onward swim
 The ghostly mists, from silent land to land,
 From gulf to gulf; now the whole air grows dim—
 Like living men, darkling a space, they stand.
 But lo! a sunbeam, like a cherubim,
 Scatters them onward like a flaming brand.

IV.

I think this is the very stillest place
 On all God's earth, and yet no rest is here.
 The vapours mirror'd in the black loch's face
 Drift on like frantic shapes and disappear;
 A never-ceasing murmur in mine ear
 Tells me of waters wild that flow and flow.
 There is no rest at all afar or near,
 Only a sense of things that moan and go.

And, lo! the still small life these limbs contain
I feel flows on like those, restless and proud;
Before that breathing nought within my brain
Pauses, but all drifts on like mist and cloud;
Only the bald peaks and the stones remain,
Frozen before Thee, desolate and bowed.

v.

And whither, O ye vapours, do ye wend?
Stirred by that weary breathing, whither away?
And whither, O ye dreams, that night and day
Drift o'er the troublous life, tremble, and blend
To broken lineaments of that far Friend,
Whose strange breath's come and go ye feel so deep?
O soul that hast no rest and seekest sleep,
Whither? and will thy wanderings ever end?
All things that be are full of a quick pain;
Onward we fleet, swift as the running rill;
The vapours drift, the mists within the brain
Float on obscuringly, and have no will;
Only the bare peaks and the stones remain;
These only,—and a God, sublime and still.*

The light died off the peaks, the vapours darkened,
and the cold chill of the night crept into the air.
Then suddenly, without a ray of warning, the moon
swept up out of the east—huge as a shield, yellow
as a water-lily, more luminous than any gold. It
wanted but the moon to complete the spell. The

* These sonnets have already appeared as a portion of 'The Book of Orm: a Prelude to the Epic.'

dim light scarcely penetrated into the Corry, save where a deep streak of silver shadow broke the blackness of the lake. The walls of the hollow grew pitch dark, though the peaks were faintly lit. The vapours gathered in the hollow interstices of gloom. Now, where all had been stillness, mysterious noises grew,—wild voices, whispers, murmurs, infinite ululations.

“ Vero è, che' n su la proda mi trovai
Della valle d'abisso dolorosa,
Che tuono accoglie d'infiniti guai !”

The moan of torrents was audible, the murmur of wind.

It is not our purpose to chronicle in detail the experiences of the night. Suffice it to say that for many a long hour we paced about the ghostly scene, and then, worn out and wearied, slipt ourselves into our coverings, and sleep as snugly as worms in their cocoons under the overhanging eaves of the mighty rock. By this time the yellow moon, after burning her way through the gathering vapours and reddening to crimson fire at the edges, had disappeared altogether, taking with her all the stars; but the

summer night still preserved a dim dreamy light in the very heart of shadows. How long the Wanderer first slept he knows not, but he awakened with a wild start, and found all the vials of heaven opening and pouring down on his devoted head. The darkness was full of a dull roar,—the splashing of the heavy drops on solid stone, the moan of wind, the cry of torrents. “As a hundred hills on Morven; as the streams of a hundred hills; as clouds fly successive over heaven; or as the dark ocean assaults the shore of the desert; so roaring, so vast, so terrible, the armies mixed on Lena’s echoing heath.”* The

* Or, as translated more literally by the Rev. Mr. Macpherson of Inveraray:—

“As a hundred winds in the oak of Morven;
As a hundred streams from the steep-sided mountain;
As clouds gathering thick and black;
As the great ocean pouring on the shore,
So broad, roaring, dark and fierce,
Met the braves a-fire, on Lena.
The shout of the hosts on the bones of the mountains
Was a torrent in a night of storm
When bursts the clouds on gloomy Cona,
And a thousand ghosts are shrieking loud
On the viewless crooked wind of the cairns.”

OSSIAN’S POEMS. *Fingal*, book iii.

Cuchullins were busy again at their old pastime of storm-brewing. It became expedient to draw closer under the shelter of the boulder out of the reach of the buckets of water dripping over the eaves. This done, the Wanderer listened drowsily for a time to the wild sounds around him, and then, soothed by their monotony, slept again. Happy is the man who can sleep anywhere, on shipboard, in the saddle, up a tree, on the top of Ben Nevis, and under all circumstances in all weathers. Something of this virtue had been imparted to the Wanderer by his wild life afloat; and he still carried the drowsy spell of the sea with him, mesmerising body and mind to slumber anywhere at a moment's notice.

When he opened his eyes again, and with bodily sensations akin to those of a parboiled lobster gazed around him, it was daylight—a dim, doubtful, rainy light, but still the light of day. The Corry was one mass of gray vapour, hiding everything to the utmost peaks, and a thin “smurr” of rain filled all the doubtful air above the loch. Hamish Shaw, wreathed up in the shape of the letter S, was breathing stertorously, and to awaken him the

Wanderer tickled his nose with a spike of heather; whereat he opened his eyes, smiled grimly, and at once, without a moment's hesitation, with all the quickness of instinct, delivered his criticism on the weather. "There'll be rain the day, and a breeze; the wind's awa' into the south-west." Then, without more preamble, he jumped up, rubbed his hands through his matted hair, and surveyed the scene about him.

"The sun had opened golden yellow
From his case,
Though still the sky wore dark and drumly
A scarr'd and frowning face;
Then troubled, tawny, dense, dun-bellied,
Scowling and sea-blue;
Every dye that's in the tartan
O'er it grew.
Far away to the wild westward
Grim it lowered,
Where rain-charg'd clouds on thick squalls wandering
Loomed and towered."*

With a grim shake of the head, Hamish got out spirit-lamp, kitchener, &c., and proceeded to make breakfast. Meantime, the Wanderer threaded his

* The 'Birlinn.' By Alastair Mac Mhaigstair Alastair.

way to the water's edge, and divesting himself of his hot uncomfortable clothing, plunged in for a swim. A dozen strokes were enough; for the black deeps filled one with an eerie shudder, and the vapours hung cold and dreadful overhead. Dripping like a naiad, the Wanderer got into his clothes, and rushed about wildly to restore the circulation. A quarter of an hour afterwards, he breakfasted royally on bread and cold meat, with a tumbler of spirits and water—in all of which he was gladly joined by the faithful Hamish. Breakfast over, the twain made their devious way down the Corry, pausing ever and anon to contemplate the stormy scene behind them.

A high wind in sharp squalls was blowing mist and cloud from the sea: steadily and swiftly the vapour drifted along, with interstices dimly luminous, from the south-west; but directly they reached the unseen heights, they seemed to pause altogether, and add to the motionless darkness. Below that darkness a gray reflected light—not light, but rather darkness visible—moved along the precipices of stone, save where mists steamed from the abyss, or the silver threads of cataracts flashed,

“Motionless as ice,
Frozen by distance.”

Wild unearthly noises, strange as the shriek of the water-kelpie, issued from the abysses. The black lake was broken into small sharp waves crested with foam of dazzling whiteness, contrasted with which the black furrows between seemed blacker and blacker; and over the waves here and there the gulls were screaming. The mighty rocks through which we wended diffused into the air a cold white steam, while smitten by the silver-glistening rain their furrowed cheeks dript wildly; at the base of each glimmered a pool; and everywhere around them the swollen runlets leapt noisily to mingle with the mere. The Corry, indeed, was silent no more; but the only sound within it was the murmur of its own weeping.

As we walked onward, looming gray in the mist, we suddenly became conscious of a figure standing at some little distance from us—the wild figure of a man clad in pilot trousers and a yellow oilskin coat, bare-headed, his matted locks hanging over his shoulders, his beard dripping with rain, his eyes with a look of frenzy glaring at us as we approached. Our first

impulse was one of fear—there was something unearthly in this apparition; but we advanced rapidly, anxious to examine it more closely. To our astonishment, the man, instead of inviting scrutiny, assumed a look of intense terror, and without a word of warning took to his heels. Anxious to reassure him, we followed as rapidly as possible, Hamish shouting loudly in Gaelic; but the sound of footsteps behind him and Hamish's voice, which the wind turned to a dismal moan, only made the man fly faster, never once casting a look backward, but scrambling along the perilous slopes as if all the fiends were at his heels, until the rainy mist blotted him altogether from our view. Hamish and the Wanderer looked at each other and laughed; it was rather a comical situation—man-chasing in the gorges of Corruisk.

“Who do you think he is?” said the Wanderer; “a man like ourselves, or a ghost?”

“Flesh and blood, sure enough,” replied Hamish, with a sly twinkle in his eye. “I'm thinking there will be a boat o' some sort down in the harbour yonder, and this is one of the crew. Eh, but he seemed awful scared; nae doubt he thought us something

uncanny, coming on him sae sudden in a place like this."

Wet and dripping we reached the lower end of the loch; and after one glance backward at the corry, which seems buried in the deepest gloom of night, follow the course of the river, which runs foaming over a sheet of smooth rock into Loch Scavaig, that wonderful arm of the sea. The rocks here have the smoothed and swelling forms known as *roches moutonnées*; and, as Professor Forbes observes, "it would be quite impossible to find in the Alps or elsewhere these phenomena (excepting only the high polish, which the rocks here do not admit of) in greater perfection than in the valley of Corruisk." The distance from the fresh-water loch to the salt water is little more than two hundred yards; and where the river joins the latter there is a dead calm basin, enclosed seawards by promontories and islands, and perpetually sheltered from all the winds that blow. There is no snugger anchorage in the world than this. Shut in on every side by precipices that tower far above the mast, with no view but the bare loch landward or seaward, it is

like a small mere, deep and green, in the hollow of the mountains. In the rocks at either side there are rings, to which any vessel at anchor in the basin may attach itself; for, though the place is sheltered from the full force of the wind, the squalls are terrifically sharp, and a warp is necessary, as there is no room to "swing."

And here, standing on the rock at the water's edge, we saw a small group of men, five in number, chief of whom was the fugitive from Corruisk. The latter, with excited gestures and flaming eyes, pointed to us as we approach, and all eyed us in grim and ominous silence. Fastened to the rock on which they stood was a skiff, one of those huge, shapeless fishing skiffs in which Highlanders delight, black and slimy with seaweed, with red nets heaped in the bottom, and a dog-fish—seemingly the only produce of a night's fishing—still gasping with his liver cut out in the bow. No sooner did Shaw get within earshot than he attacked the strangers with a sharp fire in Gaelic. After listening staggered for a moment, they opened on him like a pack of hounds in full cry; and it was soon apparent that

the man we had met by the loch had taken us for a couple of ghosts prowling about in the dim, mysterious light of the early morning. The men were fishers from Loch Slapin, whither they were on the point of returning; and we proposed that they should row us round by the sea to Camasunary, nine miles' walk through the great glen from Sligachan Inn. A bargain being struck, we were soon dancing on the wild waters of Loch Scavaig, and taking our farewell view of the Cuchullins.

Landing at Camasunary, we plodded weary homeward, so full of wonders, so awed and abstracted with all we had seen, that we scarcely looked at the wild gorges through which we passed. The brain was quite full, and could receive no more. Tired to death, we at last reached the *Tern*, after a walk that seemed interminable. For many days after that it was impossible to recollect in detail any picture we had seen. All was confusion—darkness, rain, mist. When the vision cleared, and the perfect memory of Corruisk arose in the mind, it seemed only a vivid dream, strange and beautiful beyond all pictures seen with the waking eyes, a reminiscence

from some forgotten life, a vision to be blent for ever with the most secret apprehensions of the soul — sleep, death, oblivion, eternity, and the grave.

CHAPTER IX.

EPILOGUE ; THE *TERN'S* LAST FLIGHT.

IT was now growing late in the year, and we were yearning to return again to the moors of Lorne. Quitting Loch Sligachan, we ran through the Sound of Scalpa, past Broadford Bay and Pabbay Island, through the narrow passage of Kyle Akin, and so on through Kyle Rhea to Isle Ornsay, where we anchored. Page after page might be filled with the exquisite pictures seen on the way through these island channels. At Isle Ornsay we were detained for nearly a fortnight by a fearful gale of wind, and occupied the time in fishing for "cuddies" over the vessel's side, rowing about in the punt, and reading Björnson's great Viking-drama in the tiny cabin, Beguiled by a treacherous peep of fine weather, we slipt out into the Sound of Sleat, intending to sail

round Ardnamurchan ; but the heavy sea soon compelled us to take shelter in Loch Nevis. After spending a black day at the last-named anchorage, we set sail again, and encountered a nasty wind from the south-west. The little *Tern* got as severe a buffeting on that occasion as a craft of the sort could well weather ; and only by the skilful seamanship of Hamish Shaw did we manage to reach our old anchorage in Rum before the gale burst in all its fury. The weather was now thoroughly broken. We were detained several days in Loch Scresort, fearing to face the great seas of the Atlantic in passing round the Rhu. A good day came at last. We had as pleasant a sail through the open sea as could well be desired. On the night of the following day the *Tern* was at her moorings in Oban Bay, and we enjoyed, for the first time after many months, the luxury of a snug bed ashore, in the White House on the Hill.

Never had the seasons been more delightfully spent. We had enjoyed sport and adventure to the full, we had drunk into our veins the fresh sense of renewed physical life, and we had enriched the soul

with a set of picturesque memories of inestimable brightness and beauty. Possibly no such novel experience could have been gained by rambling half round the civilised world in search of the beautiful. "How little do men know," we repeated, "of the wonders lying at their own thresholds!" Within two days' journey of the Great City lie these Hebrides, comparatively unknown, yet abounding in shapes of beauty and forms of life as fresh and new as those met with in the remotest islands of the Pacific. To the patient reader of our travels afloat and ashore we have only one advice to give in conclusion:—"Go and do likewise; and, until you have explored the Isles of the North in such a vessel as carried us so bravely and for so long, do not think that you have exhausted travel, or that Providence, even in the narrow limits of these British Islands of which you know so little, cannot supply your jaded humanity with a new sensation!"

THE END.

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